

HERMENEUTICS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION FOR PREACHING

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Ruth Elaine Koser**

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Ruth Elaine Koser

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
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Faculty Committee

Cornish R. Rogers

Jack C. Verheyden

6 March 1987

Date

Allen J. Moene

Dean

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Abstract

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Ruth Elaine Koser

An initial reading of the Book of Revelation leaves one wondering what its real message is. Its metaphorical style—in the form of unusual symbol cast in poetry—conveys the notion that it belongs to the genre of poetic imagination. Other enigmatical features such as numerology, structure, and visions tend to make it more confusing. These characteristics have resulted in diverse opinion as to its Christian message. As a result, the Book of Revelation has been neglected as a New Testament kerygma.

This paper addresses the problem of the avoidance of the Book of Revelation by establishing guidelines for the Biblical exegete. It creates hermeneutical axioms from research into the linguistic, historical, and theological aspects of the book. It combines disciplines of theology and hermeneutics to give direction for the art of preaching.

The historical and literary aspects of the book show that the Book of Revelation is a prophetic epistle in the genre of apocalyptic literature. John wrote as a prophet to the early church giving counsel in a time of duress and political crisis. His message from the glorified Christ to the church of Asia Minor is applicable to the church of today. The Christian is now confronted with the same deceptions, powers, and principalities. The theological message from the prophet of Patmos is that God, in His sovereignty, has established His purpose for humankind. He is active in history and is, was, and ever will be present to His people. Their future is assured because their salvation has

been established by God Himself.

The Book of Revelation is a rich source for preaching. The roots of the Gospel lie imbedded in the message of John of Patmos. He has encoded his message in an apocalyptic style which reveals God's will for His people and what He wishes them to do. The nurturing message of Christian apocalyptic hope can find a normative expression in the preaching event.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Book of Revelation functions as a priestly document. However, it remains untapped as a pastoral instrument in the church. The hermeneutics that have been applied to the Book have varied from the hermeneutic of extreme literalism to no hermeneutic at all--simply, by avoiding the Book. The symbolic language and style in which it is written have been a source of confusion for the exegete. The diverse literature surrounding the Book has caused pastors to avoid the problem of confronting the Book.

Problem Addressed

This project will address the problem of misuse and avoidance of the Book of Revelation by establishing guidelines of interpretation for the preaching ministry.

Importance of the Problem

The symbolism in the Book permeates the present culture. Words such as Armageddon and anti-Christ are commonplace. Persons become confused by what is heard, and they translate the future as a total cataclysmic catastrophe. Novels and movies have taken up themes from the Book while the pastoral message has been avoided. It behooves the church to stop ignoring its message of hope while the secular world tries to give insight into its symbolism.

The Book of Revelation is important to the church for several reasons. People are living in a time of transition. Persons who live in a period of the close of one century and the beginning of the next century are aware of this period of transition. It creates a sense of the end of an era and the

beginning of the new era in which things will be different. The closing of a century and the closing of a millennium have a double beginning and end. Beginnings and ends are associated with the new and with reform. Entrance into the next millennium has involved crisis where the old has been questioned as a way of life, and the new has challenged the oppressive social institutions. The close of this millennium has produced a sudden impact of more advanced technology and scientific discovery. This has hastened an attitude of wanting a perfect society now. The ethos of the church constructs its ideal around its understanding of people being able to send persons into orbit and to cure diseases. This could bring in Utopia. Yet, the world is also on the brink of an Armageddon which could bring the world to an end. The tension of the desired Utopia with the reality of impending doom creates the formation of cults. This adds to the confusion as the church members listen to what the cults have to say.

In the midst of this tension, the Western Church is aware of the sense of the loss of power on the part of the Western government to control the world. As Western domination diminishes, events seem to become more out of control. This still does not keep the West from its involvement and absorption into the mainstream of conflict. The tension of powerlessness with involvement initiates a need for help. This powerlessness cries for need of divine intervention as those events that are out of control point to future catastrophe. For the first time in history, people can relate to total annihilation of civilization through nuclear war. For the first time in history, people can relate to the destruction of the biosphere through carelessness and deliberate pollution. The sense of powerlessness to control the atmosphere, rivers, forests, and lakes which sustain life is a reality.

As the news media and television deal with these issues, the images from the Book of Revelation become a part of the ethos of society. It is here that the images of the Book of Revelation are translated into specific meaning for specific events. This, however, gives rise to much misunderstanding and misuse of the Book of Revelation.

The church becomes informed not only by the television news media, but also by the television ministry. Much television ministry conveys the Book of Revelation as a gloom and doom scenario with specific images being related to specific events in space and time. It is often seen as an actual prediction of the last years of the world in linear fashion. The theology of hope and message of joy remain untouched. The mission of the church to bring in the kingdom of God is reduced to the shoulds and oughts of misguided ethics. The need is for the message of the Book to be clarified for the church so that it will be able to interpret the mass media.

The church as well as the secular world becomes informed by literature on the bestseller list. People are interested in the future, and the authoritative books portray the present generation as being the doomed generation that sees the end of the world. The numerology of the Book is taken literally, and specific images are related to specific events. The literature does not begin to inform the public and the church with the New Testament theology of hope and the work of the church in the midst of idolatry. The already established kingdom of God is viewed only as a future event.

Because of the need for the Book to speak to today's concerns and the confusion surrounding it, it is time for pastors to introduce it into their preaching. In order to relate to the Book's many images and to its theological concepts, the teaching/preaching ministry would find it of great

value to include the Book of Revelation in the Bible study program. Preaching assumes a certain amount of previous knowledge of Biblical content. The saints require teaching from the Book of Revelation to help them relate to today's world view and to make the sermon applicable to everyday life.

Thesis

The Book of Revelation has preaching value for the church.

Work Previously Done in the Field

There have been volumes of literature written about the Book of Revelation. The commentaries on the Book alone are numerous. However, there have been very few attempts to present a coherent and simple approach to discovering the message of Revelation. Four are worthy of mention. Paul S. Minear has written a book which contains methods for interpreting apocalyptic writing. He focuses on four texts from the Book of Revelation and includes a chapter on aids for the interpreter. The book is New Testament Apocalyptic (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

The Knox preaching guide series includes a book on Revelation that was written by James Blevens. This book is easily read and it gives suggestions for sermon titles and points for an outline. It covers the entire Book of Revelation. The book is Revelation, ed. John Hayes, Knox Preaching Guides (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984).

A work which gives excellent hermeneutics for today's political situation was written by William Stringfellow, an attorney, who had deep insight into the Book of Revelation. He said that the Book of Revelation can help to discern good from evil as well as avoid the confusion and deception of mistaking one for another. It is also a political document which shows the nature of evil throughout history. The book is An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land (Waco, Texas: World Books, 1979).

The last work, written by Geoffrey Wainwright, is not a preaching guide. It is, however, a book which would inform preaching from the standpoint of understanding the Eucharist as an eschatological event. Geoffrey Wainwright is a professor of systematic theology who found the eschatological character of the Eucharist in systematic theology, Biblical theology, and liturgy of the past. His theological perspective focuses on the eschatological kingdom that has already entered into the world while the future purpose of God is coming into the present. The Eucharist is a foretaste of the kingdom, and it proclaims the kingdom in the present. The Eucharistic theology moves from the usual presence of Christ to the hope of the collective community as already in the established community of God. The Eucharistic celebration celebrates the splendor of the final kingdom, and it is now the meal of the kingdom. The book is Eucharist and Eschatology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Scope and Limitations

The project deals with preaching from the Book of Revelation. This Book is different in its style and literary form from the other New Testament Books. The modern interpreter will have to understand the Book's genre. It is often classified as being only an apocalyptic writing. This project will examine the Book in order to place it in its proper perspective as a New Testament Epistle.

Chapter 2 will deal with the historical and literary components of the Book. In order to understand literature and the intent of the author, it becomes necessary to enter into his historical situation. Insight and understanding are increased when the author's life, circumstances, and audience are prominent points of focus. Research into the cultural, political, and social milieu of the day prevents the interpreter of Scripture from

bringing personal biased assumptions to the text. The historical observation prevents the text from being interpreted through the present cultural world view. Scripture was written in history, and the writer's intent was informed and molded by his particular time in history.

The interpreter is also able to enter into dialogue with the intent of the Scripture if the exegete understands the type of literature, the author's literary devices, and the author's sources.

Chapter 3 will utilize the information that was compiled in Chapter 2 in order to address the basic preaching questions of authorship, date, place, purpose, and target audience. This enables the exegete to identify with the historical situation of the author. Each piece of literature brings with it its own specific problems that lend themselves to difficulty in interpretation. When there is difficulty in interpreting the meaning of the original intent of the author, the literature in question requires rules or hermeneutics for interpretation. Seven axioms will be derived from a more intense explanation of the Apocalypse's differences which appear to present a problem. The Apocalypse is written in both apocalyptic and prophetic style, and in many instances the modern world view prohibits understanding.

Chapter 4 will tell the Apocalypse in story form in vernacular English so that the reader will get an overview of the complete Book. When the Apocalypse is taken out of its poetic form of parallel Hebrew poetry, it becomes more comprehensive to the reader. A complete, simplified rendition will enable the reader to relate more readily to the remaining chapters.

Chapter 5 will concern itself with Biblical interpretation. While Scripture was written in history and is thereby shaped by its culture, language, literary style, and world view, Scripture still contains humankind's history. Humankind does not live in isolation, but rather, it lives in

relationship. The Biblical message contains a message regarding God and His relationship with humankind. This in turn affects their relationship to each other. The Biblical writers communicate God's activity in history from Genesis to Revelation. God has spoken in many and diverse ways, and He has spoken in His Son. People can only find themselves asking questions as they relate to humankind within a theological reference. The revealed pattern of God's activity with humankind in the Old and New Testament shows a concerned God who has acted and will act for the salvation of His people.

The main different approaches to interpretation will be presented to show that the Christian kerygma is the outworking of God's activity in history. It is the central act of God in Christ through the incarnation, death, and resurrection that brings all of history into relationship with God's purpose for humankind. The Book of Revelation puts a sharp focus on that purpose as it reflects the Christian Gospel through an atypical New Testament genre. Apocalyptic writing is found in the New Testament, but it contains the Christian message.

Chapter 6 will undertake the task of bringing the systematic theology of the writer under the categories of humankind, God, and Christ. This chapter will answer the theological questions of the interpreter as they relate to God, Christ, and humankind.

Chapter 7 will move its approach to finding hermeneutical axioms by shifting focus. It will view John's theology through the main purpose of his Apocalypse. He wrote a New Testament Epistle through his prophetic vocation. The epistle was communicated to him through the revelation of Jesus Christ. This approach gives the interpreter succinct axioms taken from the wider perspective of the book. The prophetic and the revelatory aspects

that are informed by the systematic theology enable the interpreter to embrace a more comprehensive and specific theology.

Chapter 8 will give the contemporary theological interpretation based on the foregoing research. The examination of the Book from the various aspects now allows the interpreter to bridge the historical gap from the author's culture and literary style to the present culture to speak the prophetic Word to the modern world.

Chapter 9 will apply John's message in the form of an example sermon and sermon perspectives. It will also deal with the Book's value for the preaching year, liturgy, and use of imagery.

The scope of dealing with the Book of Revelation is vast. One could examine apocalyptic literature, symbols, myth, poetry, and worship, but this would only begin to inform one of the many aspects of the Book. Because this project deals only with preaching from the Book of Revelation, it becomes necessary to delimit the scope to those areas which will contribute to making the Book applicable to the sermon. The above have been chosen by the author to represent that framework necessary for understanding the Book of Revelation and bringing it into its proper place as a New Testament kerygma.

Procedure for Integration

This project will integrate the disciplines of theology and preaching. In order for these two disciplines to be integrated, it becomes necessary to determine the principles which interpret a given text. The message of the particular Book to the original hearers and the message to the church of today must close the gap which provides misunderstanding. In order for the gap to be closed, the literary, historical, and theological aspects of the Book have to be investigated. From this, a set of rules or hermeneutics can be

determined to aid the interpreter in closing the gap between the writer and the Sunday morning sermon. The theological statements and the discipline of hermeneutics inform the discipline of preaching. The various aspects will be investigated and integrated through library research.

CHAPTER 2

Historical and Literary Data

The last Book of the Bible has often been viewed as an enigma. For many, it stands as a mysterious riddle that cannot be solved. On the other end of the extreme, it represents a chronological linear prediction of the end of the world. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the historical and literary component of this Book in order to establish an enlightened approach to elucidate the Book. A disciplined form of understanding is required in order to bridge the gap of the writer and the contemporary time.

Literary Historical Analysis

The following will delimit the literary historical analysis to only those components which will demonstrate the framework of discerning the Book's message. Considering the volumes of literature and the quantity of diverse opinion, a simplified framework should enable the exegete to make the Book of Revelation applicable to the life of the church.

Genre

The opening statement of the Book identifies the type of literature that the Book of Revelation represents. It is the revelation (1:1). The Greek word is apokalupsis, which means to unveil that which has been unknown. It is "an uncovering, laying bare, making naked . . . disclosure of truth, instruction, concerning divine things before unknown—especially those relating to the Christian salvation."¹

¹ C. L. Wilibald Grim, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, trans. Joseph H. Thayer, 2nd ed. (New York: American Book Company, 1889), 62.

The revelation is given to Jesus Christ by God so that God's people will be able to see what will shortly transpire (1:1-2). It is the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1). This expresses that it is Jesus who is doing the unveiling. The author, John, is the means by which the Apocalypse will become known (1:1-2). This type of literature is similar with other writings called apocalyptic, but it is unique in its being from Jesus Christ. Christ is the revealer because He has won the right to open and break the seal of humankind's salvation (5:2-5).

The generic category of this writing flourished before and during the early Christian era. An extensive survey was done by John Collins on apocalyptic literature in the time period between 250 B.C.E. to 250 C.E. The study reveals that the genre apocalyptic has constant constituents which permit a definition to be formulated.² The following gives the definition:

"Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other worldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.³

The majority of apocalyptic literature that fits this description can be found in Jewish and Christian apocalypses. Many of the apocalyptic writings are Gnostic, Greco-Roman, and Persian.⁴

There are a great many varieties of apocalyptic literature within this definition boundary. These can be classified into six different types of literature. Classifications in group one are the following: "(1a) 'Historical'

² John Collins, "Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre," Semina 14 (1979): 5.

³ Collins, 9.

⁴ Collins, 12.

Apocalypses with No Otherworldly Journey . . . (1b) Apocalypses with Cosmic and/or Political Eschatology . . . (1c) Apocalypses with Only Personal Eschatology."⁵ Classifications in group two are the following: "(2a) 'Historical' Apocalypses with An Otherworldly Journey . . . (2b) Otherworldly Journeys with Cosmic and/or Political Eschatology . . . (2c) Otherworldly Journey with Only Personal Eschatology."⁶ Collins classified the Apocalypse of John under 1b, cosmic and/or political eschatology.⁷ He concludes that "no Jewish or Greco-Roman apocalypse conforms to this type. Other examples are the Christian Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, Apoc. Peter, and Shepherd of Hermas."⁸ Christian apocalypses are found in all types except 2a. Jewish apocalypses are found in all types except 1b and 1c. Gnostic apocalypses are found in all types except 1a and 2a.⁹

The survey shows that John's Apocalypse is classified as a Christian writing in the genre of apocalyptic literature. The writer borrows the genre of apocalyptic from the milieu of his day in order to convey his message. It would seem appropriate to put God's revelation into a style of writing that is meant for revelation.

Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic literature embodies apocalypticism, a belief system, which has two basic patterns of belief. It is dualistic and eschatological. The

⁵ Collins, 14.

⁶ Collins, 14-15.

⁷ Collins, 14.

⁸ Collins, 14.

⁹ Collins, 15.

dualism consists of two opposing forces of good and evil in the universe.¹⁰ The future hope "in the apocalyptic pattern is combined with the cosmic dualism. For both time and beyond-time are involved; there are two distinct separate ages."¹¹ The second age is not an outgrowth of the first age, but rather, it is a new creation. The first age is corrupt, and it is under the influence of the force of evil. The righteous people are oppressed under this regime, and their only hope lies in the intervention of good. This results in a cosmic battle whose outcome will be victorious for the righteous. The age to come will be a state of blessedness when evil is overthrown. There are secondary features of apocalypticism which may or may not be present in addition to the basic pattern. The secondary features are visions, pseudonymity, a messiah, angelology, demonology, animal symbolism, numerology, predicted woes, and astral influences.¹²

Author

The author identifies himself as John. The name, John, was as common in both Greek and Jewish culture as it is today. The name, John, has given rise to volumes of speculation as to which John was the author. Scholars have not come to any unanimous conclusion. Arguments have been set forth ranging from seeing the Book as a composite work to ascribing the work to the Apostle John. Considering the diverse discussion among scholars about the identity of the author, it would be unprofitable to belabor the point of his identity in this particular project.

¹⁰ Martin Rist, "Apocalypticism," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 1, 157-61.

¹¹ Rist, 158.

¹² Rist, 158-61.

It is more important to see what the author says about himself. This gives clues about the literary function of John's work and his life's circumstances. In this introduction, he makes numerous statements that enable one to construct a fair biography. He informs his readers that he is a servant of Christ (1:1). The document that he is writing is a prophecy which indicates that John is a prophet (1:3). The opening greeting reflects the usual letter form which is used for distribution to the churches (1:4). He calls himself John, their brother, and this indicates that they know who he is and that he is in close relationship with them. He shares with his readers their suffering and endurance in Jesus Christ. He is, however incarcerated on an island called Patmos because he has borne testimony to Jesus (1:9).

John is a Christian prophet who is writing a revelation from Jesus Christ in the form of an epistle to the churches. The message is delivered in the form of an epistle because he is condemned to exile. The circumstances surrounding his exile as a political prisoner give cause for the epistle to be written.

The Book as Epistle

The letter was used as a form of instruction in the Greek world before the Christian era. The popularity of this form of communication was assisted by the increase of Greek institutions of learning. Examples of these letters, written by persons such as Aristotle and Epicurus, can be found in antiquity. Christian writers adopted this form of writing when sending their letters of instruction to the church.¹³

The letter format was also used in the Book of Revelation which used

¹³ George Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, eds. Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, New Century Bible (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1974), 12.

much the same standard formula of that day. The Apocalypse also used the same formula of Paul's Epistles. That is, it contained the greeting, addressee, and sender. John replaced the usual Greek greeting with a Christianized formula (1:4).

John, like Paul, needed no elaborate introduction to his readers in the churches. The fact that he gives the addressee and only his first name indicates these people were aware of who he was. His confidence and friendly concern imply that he was respected by his hearers. It also implies that his letter would be affirmatively received by the church.

The epistle was written to the seven churches in the province of Asia (1:4). Asia Minor "embraced a number of Greek states which in the 3rd century BC fell under the control of the kings of Pergamum. In 133 BC the royal possessions were bequeathed to the Romans."¹⁴ The area was then organized into a Roman province which included the western coast, along with the adjacent islands, and extended as far inland as the Anatolian plateau. At first the Greek states suffered because of Roman exploitation, but they flourished during the New Testament period.¹⁵

Considering there were more churches in the Roman province, the number seven would inform the reader that the message was meant as an epistle expressing concern to the need of the whole church.

The Epistle as Prophecy

The prelude introduces the Apocalypse as a prophecy (1:3). Just as other prophets introduce their writing with a vision of God, John initiates his

¹⁴ E. A. J[udge], "Asia," The New Bible Dictionary, ed. James D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), 98.

¹⁵ J[udge], 98.

prophetic Book with a vision of God. He receives a divine commission to write down the revelation (1:19). The prophecy would take the form of an epistle to the churches. While prophecy is usually in the form of verbal address, John's epistle is the Christian prophetic Word for the seven churches.

Prophecy is defined as "the inspired speech of charismatic preachers through whom God's plan of salvation for the world and the community and His will for the life of individual Christians are made known."¹⁶ The prophet proclaims not "only what God intends to do, he also proclaims what God would have done by men."¹⁷ In doing so, the prophet exhorts and consoles those who need earnest advice and courage. His prophetic message will bring to light the evilness of humankind.¹⁸

John considers himself to be a prophet on the level of all the other prophets. This gives him the authority to require obedience from his listeners. His listeners will be blessed if they keep his prophecy because the time is at hand (1:3). Time, kairos, is used in an eschatological sense to infer that the moment of crisis has arrived.¹⁹ The moment of crisis has arrived, and the purpose of God is to be revealed to the servants of God by a prophetic epistle.

¹⁶ Gerhard Friedrich, "Prophet," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 6, 1968.

¹⁷ Friedrich, 848.

¹⁸ Friedrich, 848.

¹⁹ Robert Mounce, The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 66.

Prophecy as Revelation

The exhortations and warnings that the prophet gives to the people come through his prophetic calling. These exhortations reveal the will and purpose of God. The revelation that John receives is mediated by Jesus Christ to show what will shortly transpire (1:1). John is expressing the nature and purpose of his exhortation by stating that it is revelation or unveiling from God. He puts the prophetic revelation into the written form of apocalyptic or revelation literature. George Caird asserts that "John would insist that his book was prophecy. But the most important difference is that his book is the apocalypse of Jesus Christ."²⁰ This requires John to transpose apocalyptic literature into the new thought form of the Gospel.

It would be appropriate to say that the Revelation is an Apocalypse. This tautology becomes clear when it is understood that the unveiling had been delivered in a genre of literature. It is through the vocation of prophet that John extends his revelation to the churches in epistle form. This distinctive and unique revelation of Jesus Christ provides material for John to write an Apokalupsis.

Pseudonym

From the third century B.C., all Jewish apocalyptic was under an assumed name.²¹ From the time of Ezra, the law held a position of supremacy, and all religious form became secondary. Since the law was sufficient, there was no need of revealing the message of the will of God;

²⁰ George Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 10-11.

²¹ Robert H. Charles, Lectures on the Apocalypse (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1922), 66.

thus the prophet became useless and obsolete. Because of this, if people felt that they had a message which revealed the will of God, they resorted to pseudonymity. They made their exhortations under the name of some ancient and esteemed worthy who lived before the time of Ezra. With the advent of Christianity, the law was forced into the background; and prophecy again took its prominent place. It no longer looked to the past for its exhortation, but rather, relied on revelation. John's Christian apocalyptic made no mention of the law.²² The new Christian prophetic mindset created a world view that provided the paradigm for Christian thought.

The author, John, takes Christian revelation and puts it into writing under his own name. He states that his name is John; he gives indication that he is well known to the churches in Asia Minor; he is respected enough as a teacher and prophet to have his revelation read in the worship service (1:1-4). As a New Testament Epistle, it does not require a pseudonym.

Date

The author informs his readers that he has been exiled to the island of Patmos, and he shares in their suffering (1:9). From this, scholars have dated the time of writing as occurring during the time of compulsory emperor worship in the Roman Empire. Some scholars have dated the Book as early as the time of Claudius, A.D. 41-54; and some have extended the date into the reign of Trajan, A.D. 98-117. The majority of consensus among scholars has been that the date of writing was during the time of Domitian, A.D. 81-96.²³ Irenaeus was of the belief that the apocalyptic vision of John was written during Domitian's reign. He affirmed, "For that was seen no very long time

²² Charles, Lectures, 67-68.

²³ Mounce, 32-35.

since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."²⁴

The Apocalypse stemmed from a pastorly concern of the author for the people who were in the midst of a conflict between a totalitarian government and loyalty to God. The cult of emperor worship developed naturally in that time era because it was undergirded by polytheism, worship of ancestors, and hero worship. The emperors sought to strengthen their authority by taking on a divine condition. Caesar accepted worship, and he had a temple erected to his divinity. Augustus allowed temples for his divinity to be built in the provinces; and after his death, he was widely worshipped. Caligula demanded that the Roman subjects worship his statue. By A.D. 54, emperor worship was firmly entrenched into the Roman society. It was during the reign of Domitian that the failure to recognize the emperor as divine was made punishable by the state.²⁵

The crises of the times are not only reflected by the author's concern for Christian loyalty rather than emperor worship but also with his concern for their suffering. The Emperor Nero began a policy of malevolence toward Christians after the great fire. Nero was unable to squelch the rumor that the fire was not an order.²⁶ Tacitus, the Roman historian, recorded the crisis of the times. He stated, "Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a

²⁴ Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, trans., Irenaeus Against Heresies, Book V, Vol. II, vol. 9 of Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 138.

²⁵ Mounce, 32-33.

²⁶ Tacitus, The Annals of Tacitus, trans. John Jackson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), bk. 15, chap. 44.

class of men loathed for vices, whom the crowd styled Christians."²⁷ Tacitus described their punishment, "First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race."²⁸ Tacitus recorded the punishment for hatred of the human race, "And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night."²⁹ Nero offered his gardens as the place for execution where he would mingle with the crowd dressed as a charioteer. The Roman populace, however, was moved to pity for the new sect; they felt that the punishment was not for the good of the state. Rather, they perceived that the perverted needs of one man were being satiated.³⁰ Other writers of antiquity have recorded both Nero and Domitian as outstanding wanton and cruel leaders. Tertullian mentioned both Nero and Domitian as cruel political leaders. He commented, "Domitian, too, a man of Nero's type in cruelty, tried his hand at persecution."³¹ Eusebius also mentioned both rulers in the context of cruelty and hostility. Domitian "showed himself to be the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was second to promote persecution against us."³² Suetonius also described Nero's reign in relationship

²⁷ Annals 15.44.

²⁸ Annals 15.44.

²⁹ Annals 15.44.

³⁰ Annals 15.44.

³¹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., Apologeticus V, vol. 11 of Ante-Nicene Christian Library: The Writings of Tertullian, Vol. I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 64.

³² Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), bk. 3, chap. 17.

to the Christians. He stated, "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."³³

Further evidence for political unrest can be determined by the succession of emperors in the year A.D. 69. Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68 by plunging a dagger into his throat.³⁴ In A.D. 69, Galba was "butchered and abandoned by his followers."³⁵ His successor, Ortho, "stabbed himself with a single stroke under the left breast."³⁶ He had reigned ninety-five days.³⁷ His successor was Vitellius who was defeated, tortured, and killed.³⁸ Vaspasian became the next emperor and brought some stability to an unsettled empire. He reigned between A.D. 69 and A.D. 79.³⁹ Counting Nero, there were five emperors within a little over a year.

In addition to the violence among political leaders, there were revolts, rioting, and arson among the people. A final assault was waged on Jerusalem and in A.D. 70, it was destroyed in the siege.⁴⁰ Also, the forces of nature added to the forbidding climate of the day. Laodicea was laid in ruins by earthquake in A.D. 60.⁴¹ Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79.⁴² A comet

³³ Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), bk. 6, chap. 16.

³⁴ Lives 6.49.57.

³⁵ Lives 7.1.20

³⁶ Lives 7.11.

³⁷ Lives 7.11.

³⁸ Lives 7.17.

³⁹ Lives 8.1.24.

⁴⁰ John Sweet, Revelation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 23.

⁴¹ Annals 14.27.

⁴² Pliny, The Letters of Pliny, trans. William Melmoth (New York: Macmillan, 1923), bk. 6, chap. 16.

appeared in A.D. 60 which the people interpreted as being an omen that foretold the death of the monarchy.⁴³

One can somewhat identify with the social and political unrest that was manifest in that particular century. Persons who were part of it certainly must have been under a psychological mindset which foretold gloom and despair. Hope for a brighter future would have been dimmed for Christians who could anticipate exile and even death. One can place the writing of the Apocalypse sometime during this tumultuous period. Most scholars select the date of Domitian's reign because "Christian tradition unanimously represents Domitian to be the first persecutor of Christians after Nero."⁴⁴

Influence on Creativity

The Apocalypse of John has influenced human creativity throughout history. Literature, painting, cathedrals, and music abound with John's imagination as artists have attempted to relate to his message.

Among the many works of George Handel in the eighteenth century, the Messiah stands out as an artistic achievement. A more recent well-known hymn that reflects the imagery of the Apocalypse is "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." The author captured the theology of John in vivid imagery as she related it to the normative situation. As the Civil War threatened the unity and peace of the new nation, the song served as a prophetic consolation that God's truth and justice will prevail through judgment. Christ "is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the faithful lightning of His terrible swift sword." The patriotic song was written

⁴³ Annals 14.22.

⁴⁴ Beasley-Murray, 38.

by Julia Howe in 1861 while she visited the Union troops.⁴⁵

Nowhere is the theology of the Apocalypse made more vivid than in the cathedrals of Europe. Here the themes of judgment, evil, heaven, hell, and God's throne are etched in living stone for centuries to come. Mathias Rissi observed that "artists of the Middle Ages sought to fashion their churches precisely according to John's vision of the heavenly city, so as to create a visible image of the nature of the church."⁴⁶

The vivid imagery and themes of John's Apocalypse have been copied by artists to make theological statements. Only "with the exception of the Psalms and the Gospels, no book of the Bible has been so frequently illustrated throughout the centuries, in spite of the difficulties it offers to transcription into visual forms."⁴⁷ Perhaps the most influential artist of the Apocalypse was Albrecht Durer. His work, "a cycle of 15 woodcuts published with a German as well as a Latin text in 1498, is one of the greatest achievements of German art."⁴⁸ Durer used the images of John by adapting them to his own imagination by engraving them into wood. He spoke to the social and religious mood of his time. They were not designed for collectors, but rather, for the imagination of everyone. He found a willing audience in the Reformation and social change of his time. Just as John addressed the struggle against the Roman Empire, Durer captured the mood of the Refor-

⁴⁵ "Battle Hymn of the Republic," Encyclopedia Americana, International ed., 1986.

⁴⁶ Mathias Rissi, The Future of the World, Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 23 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), 39.

⁴⁷ Anabella Rossi, "Eschatology," Encyclopedia of World Art, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.

⁴⁸ Jan Bialostocki, "Albrecht Durer," Encyclopedia of World Art, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.

mation in wood. The woodcuts range from Michael and his angels to the last day where peace reigns.⁴⁹ Response to these pieces of art was so great that his influence served as models for other artists.⁵⁰

The influence of the Apocalypse on literature throughout history can also be seen. Just as the ancient mythologies were concerned with the struggle between good and evil, the literary artists of each successive generation have pointed to John's symbols to name and embellish the cosmic struggle. As writers have recognized the variegated heresies and evil in their lifetime, they have been able to develop ideas and themes from the Apocalypse. In A.D. 182, Irenaeus wrote Against Heresies.⁵¹ In the third century, Hippolytus would write a Treatise on Christ and Anti-Christ.⁵² Centuries later, Luther would call the Pope the Anti-Christ.⁵³ The Apocalypse can also be seen in the Renaissance writings of Spencer, Shakespeare, and Milton.

These are only a few examples of the Apocalypse's influence on literature throughout history. John's symbols are desirable agents of expression for the literary artist because they evoke passion which reveals the unknown quality of reality. The symbol enables truth to become a con-

⁴⁹ Bialostocki, 515.

⁵⁰ Rossi, 823.

⁵¹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., Introductory Notice, vol. 5 of Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), xviii.

⁵² S. D. F. Salmond, trans., The Writings of Hyppolytus: Bishop of Portus Fragments of Writings of Third Century, Vol. II, vol. 9 of Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 3.

⁵³ Robert R. Heitner, trans., Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer, 52 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 34: 285.

scious expression.

The Early Church

The Apocalypse was sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor. This implies that the whole Christian church was addressed. What was to happen shortly was the plight of the church universal.

The acceptance of the Apocalypse in the early church can be determined by those references that are made to it. The Book of Revelation was included in the Muratorian Canon. This indicates that it was circulated and deemed as canonical in the second century.⁵⁴ Robert Charles noted that "throughout the Christian Church during the 2nd century there is hardly any other book of the N.T. so well attested and received as the Apocalypse."⁵⁵ There were, however, protests and reservations about its validity. As the church began to set down canon, Marcion proved to be a catalyst in delimiting the number of authentic books.⁵⁶ Marcion rejected the Book of Revelation because it was too Jewish.⁵⁷ Tertullian defended the Apocalypse against Marcion.⁵⁸ Along with the influence of the Montanists who saw themselves as supplementing the Holy Scripture, the church began to concentrate on the right number of Books. The broad list of the canon

⁵⁴ Mounce, 38.

⁵⁵ Robert H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John, The International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 1: c.

⁵⁶ John N. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 58.

⁵⁷ Mounce, 38.

⁵⁸ Peter Holmes, trans., Tertullian Against Marcion, Book IV, Chapter V, vol. 3 of Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 350.

became settled around the end of the second century, but different areas held certain parts of the canon under suspicion.⁵⁹ The Apocalypse was excluded in many localities. The Apocalypse was not included in the Pshetto version of the New Testament which was completed in A.D. 411. It took centuries for the Apocalypse to be established in the Syrian church.⁶⁰ Charles pointed out that "the Apocalypse was always accepted as canonical in the West, and this same attitude towards it was gradually adopted by the Eastern Churches."⁶¹ In gradual stages, the church in both East and West arrived at a consensus of its sacred literature. The first official indication of acceptance of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament was in Athanasius's Easter letter, which was written in A.D. 367, where the Apocalypse was included.⁶²

Apocalyptic was written in the time of crisis to give hope to its readers. The concern "of the apocalypse was to explain why the righteous suffered and why the kingdom of God delayed."⁶³ Apocalyptic writings "focused on a period of time yet future when God would intervene to judge the world and establish righteousness."⁶⁴ Apocalyptic was also written under an assumed name to give it credibility of some well-known guidance. John's Apocalypse addresses the beleaguered church in its time of crisis, but the prophetic epistle no longer follows the usual dictates. He writes giving his

⁵⁹ Kelly, 59-60.

⁶⁰ Charles, Revelation, 1:cii.

⁶¹ Charles, Revelation, 1:cii.

⁶² Kelly, 60.

⁶³ Mounce, 19.

⁶⁴ Mounce, 19.

name as John, a prophet commissioned by God with the revelation of Jesus Christ, and develops a new type of apocalyptic.

Literary Analysis

The following will examine the Apocalypse from a literary standpoint. The exegete can come to understand the message of the Apocalypse when the literary aspect of the Book is enlightened.

Philological Analysis

An examination of the words used by the author shows that one out of eight words is used by no other New Testament writer. The reason for this is that he deals with a variety of specific lists. Most words found in the Apocalypse are common everyday words that would be used by anyone who had lived for some time in Ephesus. Almost all of the words are found in the Greek Old Testament.⁶⁵

The language style of the Apocalypse is uniquely Hebraic. The style is derived from the author's native Hebrew language, and the document is written in his secondary language, Greek. This naturally influences the expressions that the author uses. He has not yet mastered Greek idioms, but he is able to adopt Hebrew idioms into his Greek. He often transfers the secondary meaning of the Hebrew word into the Greek. The text exhibits Hebraic character which is translated at many points into the Greek, giving rise to grammatical irregularities of the Greek language. The Hebrew element is also seen in the manner in which the Apocalypse is written by using the poetic form of stanzas as well as Hebrew parallelism.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Henry B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), cxx-i.

⁶⁶ Robert H. Charles, Studies in the Apocalypse (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 80-102.

Sources Utilized

The apocalyptic genre makes use of symbolism. The author employs imagery from all categories of life, the animal world, and nature. The animal world provides a rich resource from which to choose the proper symbol. Nature itself represents the earth, sky, sea, rivers, thunder, hail, and earthquakes. Much imagery is drawn from people in everyday life such as merchants, kings, sea-captains, women, builders, and warriors.⁶⁷

The symbolism of the Apocalypse stems largely from the Old Testament. John uses the Hebrew text of the Old Testament relying to a great extent on the Prophetical Books. His greatest dependence is on Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel. He also uses Zechariah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk. His next degree of indebtedness goes to the Psalms and Proverbs. He also makes use of Exodus, Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 2 Kings.

Other source material comes from the Pseudepigrapha. His resources are such books as 1 Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, and the Testament of Levi. John is well acquainted with the Pseudepigrapha and totally ignores the Apocrypha.⁶⁸ If one accepts a latter date of writing, John may have been in possession of some of the New Testament writings. Some collection of the New Testament is familiar to the author.⁶⁹ John's work in some cases is "dependent on and in others parallel with the earlier books of the New Testament. The author appears to have used Matthew, Luke, 1 Thessalonians,

⁶⁷ Swete, cxxxi.

⁶⁸ Charles, Revelation, 1:lxv.

⁶⁹ Swete, clv.

1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians."⁷⁰

Source material for much of John's imagery can be found in the mythological literature of a variety of ethnic origins. The Babylonian creation epic, Enuma Elish, is preserved in seven tablets.⁷¹ It gives insight into ancient cosmology and the ordering of reality by addressing the origin of creation and chaos verses order in the universe. The poem is highly laden with monsters. An illustration of only a few sentences from the epic will reveal its monster and chaotic nature. It discloses that "mother Hubur, she who fashioned all things, Added matchless weapons, has born monster serpents, Sharp of tooth, unsparing of fang. With venom for blood she has filled their bodies."⁷² The nature myth continues, "Roaring dragons she has clothed with terror, Has crowned them with haloes, making them like gods, . . . She has set up the Viper, the Dragon, the Sphinx, The Great Lion, The Mad-Dog, and the Scorpion-Man."⁷³ In addition to these, there are the "mighty lion demons, the Dragon-Fly, the Centaur . . . Bearing weapons that spare not, fearless in battle."⁷⁴

In Hesiod's Theogony, the violent nature of the cosmic tensions is the issue in question. He describes his characters with vivid imagination, "A hundred snake heads grew from the shoulders of this terrible dragon, with black tongues flickering and fire flashing from the eyes under the brows of

⁷⁰ Charles, Revelation, 1:1xxxiii.

⁷¹ E. A. Speiser, trans., Ancient Near East Texts, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), 60.

⁷² Speiser, 63.

⁷³ Speiser, 63.

⁷⁴ Speiser, 63.

those prodigious heads."⁷⁵ The monster theme continues, "And in a hollow cave Ceto gave birth to another monster, this one invincible, with no resemblance either to mortal men or to the immortal gods . . . the savage Snake-goddess."⁷⁶

The above two examples are only two pieces of literature that describe some of the vast number of myths that flourished in the ancient world. Variations of the same myths can be found in different ancient religions and cultures. John, however, changes the traditional imagery to create characters of dramatic power to narrate his Christian apocalyptic message.

The author relies on numerology for his symbolism. He not only incorporates numerology to embody meaning in the text, but also uses it in the structure of the book. His familiarity with numerology undoubtedly is due to his familiarity with the Old Testament which deals with numbers that denote specific meanings. Furthermore, each culture has had to deal with a method for dividing its days, seasons, and year. The Hebrews had their own method of calculating time, and this Hebrew author relied on his Semitic background to diligently supply his readers with Hebrew number concepts.

Fragmentary Hypothesis

The Book of Revelation claims to come from one author. In the first and last chapter, the author claims to be the same person (1:1; 22:8). The first and last chapters have phraseology and ideas of the same character. It is evident that the author of the first and last chapter has been at work

⁷⁵ Norman O. Brown, trans., Hesiod's Theogony (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 76.

⁷⁶ Brown, 61.

throughout the Book.⁷⁷ The Apocalypse "passed through the hands of an individual who left his mark on every part of it; if he used old materials freely, they have been worked up into a form which is permeated by his own personality."⁷⁸ His own personality is seen in the Hebraic character of the text where he translates from Hebrew to Greek in his own style. This characterization and the Hebrew imagery make the Book unique from beginning to end as no other Book of the New Testament is so saturated with the imagery of the Old Testament. Yet, the author does not once quote the Old Testament word for word. He changes details and combines features from different sources. This feature is characteristic of the whole Book.⁷⁹

Redaction

The author may have re-edited his own work from time to time. The passages which appear to be written before the time of Domitian cease to be a mystery when it becomes apparent that he incorporates visions from the whole period of the emperor cult. Certain sources attesting to certain periods of time shows that John may have reedited his work. This enables the unity of the Book to remain intact.⁸⁰

Structure

The structure of the Book has been a source of diverse opinion for scholars. Attempts have been made to force the Book into a chronological linear timetable while others rely on the obvious larger structure of the Book

⁷⁷Swete, xviii.

⁷⁸Swete, li.

⁷⁹Swete, liii.

⁸⁰Charles, Lectures, 64.

which is easily identified. The series and structures of sevens soon become an enigma when the architecture of the author cannot be fit into a precise structural order. To explain this, hypotheses are often formed to explain the lack of the Book fitting into an obvious frame of reference. As an example Charles postulated the hypothesis that the author died after he completed Revelation, chapter 20:3. From this point onward, there are contradictions and confusion. The material for completing the Book was in order, but a disciple reconstructed the last part in the order that he thought was most coherent.⁸¹

John uses the influence of Greek drama in his Apocalypse. Raymond Brewer pointed out that "evidence of the influence of the Greek drama on the Apocalypse is to be found in the extensive use of choruses throughout the whole drama as set forth in chapters 4-22."⁸² It should be noted that this writing is dependent on apocalyptic models, yet it departs from apocalyptic models in that it makes use of a prominent Greek devise of choral song.⁸³ Just as Greek drama uses chorus to create unity, John uses liturgy to highlight, explain, and close sections on a positive note.

The author appears to derive the structural architecture from as diverse a panorama as he does his symbolic metaphor. Rather than writing in linear form, the author borrows his structural form from Greek drama and Roman literary rules. Greek drama puts the climax in the middle of the play. Analysis of the Apocalypse shows that the center of the Book focuses on

⁸¹ Charles, Revelation, 1:1.

⁸² Raymond Brewer, "The Influence of Greek Drama on the Apocalypse of John," Anglican Theological Review 18 (1936): 88.

⁸³ Brewer, 89.

chapters 10-14. As an example of Roman rules, such works as Vergil's Aeneid form patterns similar to the Apocalypse by forming interconnections throughout the complete work.⁸⁴ In the Apocalypse, specifics in the first chapters find mention in the last chapters. These interconnections can be found on a smaller basis in smaller sections as the author weaves the revelation throughout the drama. The Apocalypse uses much the same symmetrical literary device as the Priestly author of the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis. The symmetrical pattern of the Apocalypse has much in common with the literary form of John's day.

The distinguishing factor in the Apocalypse is that in his role as prophet, John is commissioned to transmit the revelation of Jesus Christ. Here his literary device is to begin with the visions in heaven. What has happened in heaven will happen on earth. John sees, then hears, and then explains. The prophet has had the privilege of seeing God's action in the past, present, and future. As God is active in history through judgment, the kingdom comes. The kingdom has come and is now being fulfilled in every moment of time. The end time is in the present because God has acted in the past so that the future can come.

Liturgy

Throughout his work, John disperses liturgy in a variety of forms. Odes, acclamations, hymns, and new songs are placed at strategic places to give comment on the material. The most obvious liturgies are the seven choric songs that carry the Apocalypse along by highlighting the positive aspect of the Apocalypse.

⁸⁴George E. Duckworth, Structural Patterns and Proportions in Vergil's Aeneid (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1962).

The first two choruses overarch the whole Apocalypse. They establish the sovereignty of God and the resulting redemption which is made possible through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the slain Lamb (4:8-11; 5:9-14). A new song can be sung because God is sovereign, and He will reign triumphantly.

The third chorus serves as a conclusion and prelude. A great multitude rejoices in victory because God has given them salvation. The angels join the multitude with a sevenfold ascription of praise and thanksgiving to God (7:10-12).

The fourth chorus again serves as a prelude and conclusion. Thanksgiving is given to God because He has acted through judgment so that the world has become the kingdom of God (11:15-18).

The fifth chorus is an incommunicable new song that only the triumphant church can sing. The church is standing triumphantly on Mount Zion with its Redeemer (14:3). This song gives emphasis to the outcome of the struggle in the two preceding chapters.

The sixth chorus is a prelude and conclusion. It is "The Song of Moses and the Lamb" (15:2-4). Those who had won victory rejoice and praise God. All nations will worship in His presence because His righteousness will be revealed.

The seventh chorus also serves as a prelude and conclusion. A large alleluia chorus celebrates God's righteous and true judgments, and now the marriage supper of the Lamb can take place (19:1-8). In His sovereignty, God has triumphed over all hostile opposition which has opposed Him and His followers.

John's apocalyptic epistle is meant to be read in the churches (1:4). The

prophetic epistle that John sends to the churches is apparently read on the Lord's day. John puts his revelation in the context of worship. He is in the spirit on the Lord's day (1:10). The Lord's day is the day when the early church gathers to worship. Paul informs his readers that the worship service of the early church contains hymns, lessons, revelation, tongues, and interpretations (1 Cor. 14:26). Paul's glimpse into the worship service correlates to the Apocalypse. John's prophecy is written into an apocalyptic form which he sends as an epistle to be used in the worship service. The liturgy enables the church to experience the reality of God's salvation acts in the past, present, and future. The above seven choruses present the heavenly view of worship where the earthly congregation could identify in the past, present, and future of God's salvation.

Poetic Form

John's style makes use of the poetic parallelism of Hebrew poetry.⁸⁵ Charles observed that "the twenty-two chapters of which the Book is composed, there are only four that are completely prose. In the remaining eighteen we find at times short songs, at others almost the entire text is cast into this poetic form."⁸⁶

Summary

This chapter has examined the Book of Revelation from the literary historical and literary point of view. It has entered into the historical situation of the author in order to understand his intent. It has made a liter-

⁸⁵Charles, Lectures, 41.

⁸⁶Charles, Lectures, 41.

ary analysis of the Book of Revelation to bring additional enlightenment to the message of the Book. This research provides the groundwork for the next chapter which will formulate guidelines for the interpreter.

CHAPTER 3

Hermeneutics for Literary Historical

Hermeneutics are the rules by which one interprets a written text. The Book of Revelation has been shunned because it does not appear to lend itself to an easy exegesis. It is highly laden with symbolism. Strange animals, unusual metaphor, hyperbole, combat, catastrophe, and visions are a few of the items which have accommodated diverse interpretations. The Book's linguistic style along with the use of numerology adds to the confusion of the Book. To many, the structure of the Book becomes nettling as they try to force it into a chronological pattern.

In this chapter, the writer will clarify those items which will be useful in interpreting the text. The meaning of Scripture becomes clear when it can be historically interpreted and understood from the original intent of the author. The historical and literary span that must be bridged was addressed in the previous chapter. The theological truth that the writer intends to communicate speaks through his culture and the literary devices of his day. The literary analysis enables one to formulate guidelines for the interpreter regarding the author, reader, place of writing, the date, and purpose for writing the Book. The critical investigation of the Book's wider historical implications gives information that it is written in both apocalyptic and prophetic style.

Basic Hermeneutical Questions

Guidelines will now be formulated for the interpreter from the foregoing survey of the Book of Revelation. The situation of the actual life

circumstances of the hearers and the writer enables the interpreter to understand the text.

1. Who wrote the Book? A prophet, named John, wrote the Book. John was on the island called Patmos because he was sentenced to exile for committing a crime against the Roman state. The crime was testimony to Jesus when emperor worship had become the state religion.

2. To whom and where was it addressed? John was instructed by the exalted Christ to send the revelation to the churches of Asia Minor. The churches were endangered spiritually and physically because they were confronted with a world power that threatened their survival and faith.

3. When was it written? It was written during the height of political intrigue, social unrest, and cultic emperor worship under an oppressive Roman government. The church was being persecuted to the point where persons were being exiled or killed. John may have started writing the Apocalypse at the beginning of this period and finished it during the height of emperor worship. This would make the date of writing sometime between A.D. 55 to A.D. 96.

4. Why did the author write it? John gave the churches prophetic warning and exhortation during a time of struggle. It also gave pastoral hope in a time of despair. He wrote to strengthen faith and courage as he revealed the totality of God's purpose in history. God's purpose in history also demonstrated what was to happen shortly.

Hermeneutics for Apocalyptic and Prophetic Style

John writes the Apocalypse out of a pastoral concern for the church. The source of his message is God Himself who gives it to Jesus Christ. The Faithful Witness instructs John to encode His message and deliver it to His

church. The code comes to John in visions, instruction, portent, dictation, inspiration, and cultural source materials. John encodes his message into an epistle of apocalyptic prophecy. It is the task of ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to decode John's message for the present time and need. The herald of the Word of God must decide what the cultural barriers are before baring the message that the exalted Christ gives to the church then and now. The Revelation speaks just as loudly to our time, and perhaps even more, because idolatry is much more insidious today. The following will illuminate the two-thousand year span that bridges the present culture and John's culture. A hermeneutical axiom for each perspective will then be formulated.

Heaven and Earth

It is the nature of this apocalyptic to switch back and forth from heaven to earth. John as well as other apocalyptic writers believes that people, institutions, and events have a heavenly counterpart. The author states that he is in the spirit on the Lord's day (1:10). He is in the spirit or estatic rapture, and he is transferred to heaven in order to view the earthly facsimile of the past, present, and future. This enables the apocalyptic writer to interpret the past, present, and future for his readers.¹

John's Apocalypse shows his readers what will shortly happen because he enters the throne room to view all of history. God in His sovereignty has a purpose for all of history. The world will be redeemed through the slain Lamb. Heaven has already won the victory, and now the victory will take place on earth.

Dreams and Visions

Apocalypses are known for their dreams and visions as a source of

¹ Caird, 9.

their divine knowledge. John records only visions. Visions fall into three categories. These are visions in a trance, visions in which the spirit is translated, and waking visions.² The vision of the exalted Christ is in a trance (1:10). The throne room vision is in a trance, and it is a vision in which the spirit is translated (4; 5). The vision of the great harlot is also in a trance and translated by the spirit (17:3). It would appear, however, that most of the author's visions are waking visions.

Revelation is God's self-disclosure. God is what God does and not a communicate or a projected figment of humankind's imagination onto God. God's people are confronted in truth by God's command.³ The truth of "the word of God is not filtered through the cosmos; neither is it mediated through an abstract universal such as Mankind."⁴ God's revelation means that the auditor is ordered to comply with the demand.⁵ The auditor knows that God identifies Himself in His demands in that the demands reflect His being.⁶

God reveals Himself in His mode of address. The address in the "Old Testament shows that the divine command is internalized (Jer. 31:33). The divine command is not cognitive, but rather, to know the sovereign God is personal address."⁷ When God speaks, He addresses the listener in all authority. The revelation is the encounter with God as the definite demand

² Charles, Revelation, 1:cv.

³ Julian N. Hartt, Theological Method and Imagination (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 134.

⁴ Hartt, 140.

⁵ Hartt, 135.

⁶ Hartt, 137.

⁷ Hartt, 138.

now.⁸

The divine command is addressed to a concrete person. The person who is addressed is a moral agent. The command is not a moral inventory as precept for the kingdom. The divine command to the subject is God's sovereignty which demands that His kingdom should come, and that all things will be brought into reconciliation. The kingdom of God is communion with God. The divine command is the I Am who I Am of Moses in disclosure to being with command, and people are convinced by its content and mode.⁹

John's prophecy is from Jesus Christ, and His apocalyptic letter to the churches is a divine message. This divine message is largely revealed in the form of visions. The community to which these messages are sent receives his prophetic announcement as an urgent exhortation. John is acting through his role of prophet and apocalyptic writer.

Cosmology

The Apocalypse shares with other apocalyptic writings in the use of cosmology. To the modern mind, this is perhaps the most debilitating aspect. The sun and moon lose their light and stars fall. The phenomenon that John is describing is not at all unusual. To the ancients, solar and lunar eclipses, meteorites, comets, and shooting stars were signs and omens. The science of astronomy is comparatively new, and some of its discoveries have been recent. John's scientific world acknowledges only seven planets. John's view of space and the solar system reflects his phenomenal understanding of the universe. The Book of Revelation, as well as the whole Bible, is not a scientific treatise. John is expressing theological truth through his specific

⁸ Hartt, 140.

⁹ Hartt, 140-41.

genre. As a Jewish Christian, he interpretes the activity of the sun, moon, and stars as being controlled by God. God is in control, and He is able to turn the sun black and the moon red as blood. He is able to make stars fall like fruit from a fig tree (6:12-13). John is describing eclipses and a meteoric shower in apocalyptic style.

In contrast, the present culture is informed about astronomical phenomenon on television. Eclipses and comets are perceived from a scientific point of view. Their behavior is explained, and people are instructed how and when to look at them. Nature that is understood and not threatening to survival becomes interesting rather than something to be feared. A comet is now referred to as a "dirty snowball," but in antiquity a comet must have inspired awe, fear, and mystery.

As a Hebrew apocalyptic prophet, John borrows much symbolic imagery from the Old Testament. In Hebrew thought, there was no difference between the sacred and the secular. The spiritual was expressed in the physical realm. Revelation came through nature and history, and these had the capacity for symbolic reference. Words, persons, places, objects, and activities became symbolic. Israel's God addressed it with words. It was an auditor and speaker relationship. The word, as symbol, became a living reality which carried power and authority. The prophets were responsible for much symbolism of the Old Testament. Through the symbolism of their dreams, visions, and actions, they made the divine purpose known to Israel.¹⁰

In making God's will known to Israel, references are often made to cosmological symbols. An Old Testament reference to earthquakes comes in the form of shaking the earth in the context of a judgment on idolatry (Isa.

¹⁰ Vernon H. Kooy, "Symbol, Symbolism," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, 472-76.

2:19). The earth quakes; heavens tremble; and sun, moon, and stars are darkened in context of the fearful day of the Lord; and His call to repentance (Joel 2:10). A metaphor, such as an earthquake, represents judgment on humankind's arrogant idolatry. John takes these metaphors and creates the New Testament Apocalypse.

The modern empirical mind isolates nature from the sacred. Earthquakes represent so-and-so many points on the Richter scale. Thunder, lightning, fire, thick clouds, and quaking are not associated with a theophany (Exod. 19).

Numerology

John uses numerology of the Old Testament as well as the numerology of antiquity to bring meaning to his Apocalypse. The number seven glaringly stands out in John's Apocalypse. There are, however, other numbers which he uses frequently. The meaning of many of John's numbers can be determined by their contextual use. The number two refers to witness. One witness is not admissible evidence in a Hebrew court of law (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16). Three is the number for trinity, either good or bad. This is self-evident from John's doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the demonic trinity (1:4-5; 13:1,11). The number four means earth (7:1). Six is a demonic number. It falls one number short of seven; thus it is imperfect and penultimate (13:18). Seven is the number of perfection meaning completeness (1:4). Ten indicates a mastership of earthly things (17:12-14). Twelve is a mastery of the spiritual realm (21:12-14). The square of a number intensifies and perfects (7:4).

In contrast, the present culture uses numbers in technological and scientific appropriation. The technical culture computes interest and measures the atomic weight of elements. The nearest star is computed as

being four light years away. It is only with jest and semi-belief that the number seven is referred to as being lucky.

Color

John, as well as other persons in antiquity, uses colors to denote meaning. John frequently refers to those who are dressed in white robes (6:11). The bride of Christ wears pure clean linen (19:8). White suggests the highest spiritual attainment possible through triumph. Purple and scarlet are royal colors (Matt. 27:28). In the present culture, color is a matter of combination so that it will be of aesthetic value.

Characters

John uses the apocalyptic style of powerful imagery. The powerful imagery forms present bizarre scenes which are confusing. It becomes more confusing when John uses different images for the same concepts while he merges and blends these symbols into meaning. The Apocalypse is meant to be read in the worship service of the church (1:11). As a Hebrew writer of an apocalyptic epistle, John appeals to the ears rather than the eyes of his listeners. The image provokes the concept that John is attempting to convey. The hyperbole is not meant to be translated into literal meaning through the mental picture. The image of two-hundred million squadrons of cavalry with smoke, fire, and sulphur coming from their mouths is literary and surrealistic in order to convey reality as truth.

John borrows much imagery from the highly imaginative naturalistic concepts of the pagan myths as well as from the Old Testament. His audience understands his message because they are able to relate to the various images that have a long history in the ancient world. Myths are created around beliefs in order to inform reality. The Enuma Elish (when on high) is one example of the great variety of myths from which John could

choose his images.

Structure

The structure of John's Apocalypse is symmetrical. He weaves the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ into a kaleidoscopic and telescopic metaphorical drama which reveals patterns of interconnection from the first chapter to the last. Within these patterns of interconnections, John gives his readers statements of theological truth rather than a graphic timetable of specific events which will occur in linear time.

The theological truth which John wishes to convey is that the Alpha and the Omega has entered into history to bring salvation into a world that flounders in darkness. Rather than being concerned with linear time being related to specific events, the salvation of humankind and the cosmos is the issue. The establishment of salvation requires a confrontation with the kingdom of chaos. The victory has been won, and the kingdom is now being brought into fruition. Thy kingdom come is now in process. John reveals that the transformation of the cosmos and humankind requires freedom from idolatry.

As the redemptive plan of God comes into fruition, humankind gives its allegiance to God. Persons have the choice of either worshipping idols or wearing white robes. The salvific liberation of humankind depends upon this choice. As humankind repents, the kingdom of God is established. In the New Jerusalem, nothing foul, vile, and unclean can enter; but only those who are inscribed among the Lamb's roll of the living. God's redemptive design of salvation takes place in time. The place where the reign of God is established is the space in which the kingdom comes.

The present culture has a literal mindset which is oriented to specific time. A time structured society interprets each span of time into a specific

event. An ordered society that must eat, work, and play on schedule finds it perplexing and awkward to relate to John's time and space. The juxtaposition of important activity within a certain time serves to create a mindset which needs to express itself as an event at a certain time. It then becomes difficult to relate to John's transcending time and space in telescopic and literary symmetrical form.

Axioms

The above can be stated into simplified hermeneutical axioms. The statements are designed for the exegete in order to make a speedy reference to the original intent of the author.

1. It is the nature of the Book of Revelation to switch back and forth from heaven to earth.
2. The Apocalypse is a divine message to the church.
3. John describes his cosmology phenomenologically. There was no difference between the sacred and secular in Hebrew thought.
4. Persons in antiquity used numbers to designate meaning.
5. Persons in antiquity used color to designate meaning.
6. John uses powerful imagery to convey meaning.
7. The structure of the Apocalypse is written in symmetrical form.

Summary

This chapter has devised hermeneutical axioms for the literary historical component of the Book of Revelation. The chapter has spoken to the basic hermeneutical questions that the sermon preparation requires. The Book of Revelation is specifically unique in its prophetic and apocalyptic style. This aspect of the Book requires hermeneutical rules for interpretation. Seven axioms have been established to speak to this aspect of

the Book.

The next chapter will bring the content of the Book of Revelation to the reader in story form. The language will be taken out of its usual poetic form to better enable the reader to relate to its message. Because the apocalyptic switches back and forth from heaven to earth, the reader will be informed of which place John is referring in order to avoid confusion.

CHAPTER 4

Story Content

As the reader of the Scriptures steps from the Epistles and Gospels into the New Testament Apocalypse, the reader is confronted with what seems to be a different world. The reader is grasped by an emotion which reflects the awe, frightening terror, and confusion that the first cursory glance provokes. It appears as though one is reading a Babylonian myth which really should not be at the end of the Bible.

On closer examination, however, the Book is what it says it is. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. The author has skillfully cloaked his message in an art form which reflects the theology of the New Testament. Through the Old Testament, Pseudepigrapha, and the world view of his day, he delivers a message to his own time and the present time that is pastoral, prophetic, and apocalyptic. His message of hope and salvation in the past, present, and future is brought about by the promises and acts of God. God has revealed Himself through His Lamb; and through His Lion of Judah, His people have conquered. The priests of God must, however, endure the trials that confront them. The battle against sin and idolatry must stand firm, and God's people will conquer by keeping their faith. By bringing the future into the present, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of God.

The purpose of this chapter is to ascertain the story content of the text. John unfolds a poetic drama in skillful cartoon imagery. His cast of characters personifies those truths that he wishes to convey. The message that Christ is revealing to the church is woven in the drama. John addresses

the faith of the church through a narrative richly supplied with imagery. The following will tell John's Apocalypse in story form. The story content will not include every detail, but it will concentrate on telling the story in vernacular English.

Outline for Story Content of Revelation

- I. Prologue (1:1-1-9)
- II. Letter to Churches and Glorified Christ (1:10:3)
 - A. The glorified Christ (1:10-20)
 - B. Letters to churches (2-3)
- III. The Throne Room (4-5)
 - A. God as creator (4)
 - B. Christ as redeemer (5)
- IV. The Seven Seals Judgment and Interludes (6-8:5)
 - A. Seals one through six (6)
 - B. Interlude, the church (7)
 - C. The seventh seal broken and prayers (8:1-5)
- V. The Seventh Seal of Seven Trumpets and Interlude (8:5-11:19)
 - A. Trumpets one through six (6:6-9:21)
 - B. Interlude, little scroll and witnesses (10-11)
 - C. Seventh trumpet (11:15-19)
- VI. The Present Conflict and Assured Justice (12-14)
 - A. The woman (12:1-6)
 - B. The dragon (12:7-17)
 - C. The sea beast (13:1-10)
 - D. The land beast (13:11-18)
 - E. Mount Zion (14:1-13)
 - F. The grapes of wrath (14:14-20)
- VII. The Seven Bowl Judgment (15:1-16-16:21)
 - A. Seventh trumpet and "The Song of Moses" (15:1-4)
 - B. The seven bowls (14:5-16:21)
- VIII. The Woman and the Beast (17-18)
 - A. The scarlet woman (17:1-6)
 - B. Identities clarified (17:7-18)
 - C. Fall of the scarlet woman (18:1-8)
 - D. Lament and joy (18:9:21)
- IX. Our Lord and God the Almighty Reigns (19-20)
 - A. The wedding supper (19:1-10)
 - B. King on white horse (19:11-21)
 - C. Satan defeated (20:1-10)
 - D. The great white throne (20:11-15)

- X. The Holy City
 - A. New heaven and new earth (21:1-8)
 - B. The bride (21:9-22:5)
- XI. Epilogue (22:6-21)

Prologue

John opens his Book with a prelude. He states that his Book is the revelation of Jesus Christ given to Him by God. The revelation is to show what must happen shortly. The opening greeting addresses the epistle to the seven churches in Asia.

Letters to the Churches and the

Glorified Christ

The vision of the glorified Christ calls John to His prophetic commission. In the Old Testament, the prophets are called by God to speak for Him. Here, John is called by Christ to deliver New Testament prophecy which warns the Church that they will have to be faithful so that the kingdom will come.

Glorified Christ. John is caught up in the spirit, and He sees a vision of Christ. The Son of Man appears among seven golden lamps. He is dressed in a robe and a golden girdle. His hair is snow white, and His eyes flame with fire. His voice sounds like a waterfall. He is holding seven stars in His right hand, and a two-edged sword comes out of His mouth. The glorified Christ instructs John to write down what he sees and to send it to the seven churches.

Letters to the churches. Each of the letters contains a recognition of positive and negative qualities, provides a warning, and promises a reward. The rewards are found in the end of the Apocalypse where the church will enter the city of God.

The people of God are called upon to be faithful, and in the end they

will be more than conquerors. Even if they will be called upon to lay down their lives, the outcome of the struggle will be that the church will be victorious.

The Throne Room

The throne room vision has the function of establishing the sovereignty of God. God is the Creator and the Redeemer of humankind and the world. The redemptive plan of God will come into fruition through judgment. The exalted Lamb has taken His position as the enthroned King. His kingly position has come about through His marks of slaughter by which He redeemed the world. The King now becomes the Judge as He breaks the seals.

God as creator. John is taken to heaven where he sees the throne of God in the heavenly temple. The Hebrew writer does not describe God anthropomorphically; instead the glory of God is described in a spectacular array of colors which emanate from a prism effect. Twenty-four elders and four living creatures are around the throne. Peals of thunder and lightning usher forth from the theophany while the heavenly court is actively engaged in worship.

This chapter establishes the sovereignty of God as the Lord of all creation. He occupies His throne in glory and power because He is the creator of all things. His nature is eternal because He is, was, and is coming. God is given glory and honor as the one responsible for the created order in the past, present, and the future.

Christ as redeemer. The Lamb is standing in the middle of the throne. God is holding a book in His right hand, and no one in the universe can be found that is capable of opening the seven seals of the book. As the Lamb steps forward to take the book, the elders and four creatures break into song. They are joined by a throng of angels and every created thing in the uni-

verse.

Christ has become worthy of opening the seals of the book by being slain. The Lamb, as the Redeemer, fulfills the purpose of God. All of creation enter into worship of the Lamb as He proves worthy to put into motion the redemptive plan of salvation.

The Seven Seals Judgment

and Interludes

The birth and the creation of the new age come about through God's judgment. John points out the fate and role of the church during this time.

Seals one through six. John is now on earth witnessing the unfolding of the judgments. When the first four seals are broken, each one brings forth a rider and a horse. Each horse is a different color with a different mission to accomplish. The white horse conquers. The red horse takes peace from the earth. The black horse can upset the food supply. The pale horse can kill by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts.

The fifth seal produces a cry from persons who have been slain for their witness to the Word of God. They want to know how long it will be before their blood is avenged. Each one is given a white robe. They are told to have patience until their number is complete.

The breaking of the sixth seal produces cataclysmic results of unusual dimensions. There is a violent earthquake; the sun turns black, and the moon turns red. The stars fall to the earth; the sky vanishes, and the mountains and islands are moved from their places. In response to this catastrophe, people hide themselves. They are aware that the Lamb's great day of vengeance has come.

Interlude, the church. John stops for an interlude in the seals to explain what will happen to those people of God who are on earth. Six seals

have been broken and the seventh great vengeance day is still to come. John explains the fate of the people of God on the great day of the Lamb. He describes these persons as the 144,000 and the vast throng no one could count.

An angel arrives on the scene with the seal of the living God. The seal of the living God is placed on the foreheads of the believers. John presents them as the square of the twelve tribes of Israel or 144,000.

John then describes a group of numberless people who have already come through a great ordeal. These persons have already washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. John then transfers to heaven for a moment to show the readers the victory shout of the faithful who worship before the throne.

John transfers back to earth to continue with the seventh seal. The seventh seal is elongated into trumpets, and the seventh one does not blow until chapter 11.

The seals that the Lamb has opened to this point are almost identical to His words in Mark 13:7. Here the disciples are wondering when the new age will come. The seals are part of the divine judgment necessary to bring the new age into fulfillment. Judgment is now executed from the standpoint of the cross. The author begins expanding on the theme of judgment and the bringing in of a new order into the world. His readers are now anticipating the seventh seal. The author uses a surprise element here.

Seventh seal broken and prayers. The Lamb breaks the seventh seal. John's surprise element is silence. John has transferred into heaven again. The silence lasts for half an hour. Then an angel offers prayers of all God's people. He takes a censer and fills it with fire and throws it to the earth. The result is thunder, lightning, and earthquake. After this, the seventh seal

will come into action. Seven angels will blow trumpets to implement the divine judgments of the seventh seal.

John builds up the drama for the seventh seal. God hears the prayers of the saints and will now issue forth the seventh seal trumpet judgments. The saints faith, prayers, and the sovereignty of God will bring about the city of God.

The Seventh Seal of Seven

Trumpets and Interlude

John goes back to earth. The angel has cast the fire of judgment to earth. The seventh seal will bring forth its seven trumpets.

Trumpets one through six. The first trumpet brings hail and fire mingled with blood. A third of the earth, trees, and grass are burned. The second angel causes a mountain to be hurled into the sea. A third of the sea is turned to blood and a third of the marine life dies. The third trumpet brings a star called Wormwood which poisons a third of the rivers. The forth trumpet darkens a third of the sun, moon, and stars.

The fifth trumpet brings a star that opens the abyss. Locusts and smoke come forth to torment those who do not have the seal of the living God. The un-Godly would seek death, but it cannot be found. The locust's king is named Apollyon.

The sixth trumpet brings forth 200,000,000 squadrons of cavalry. Smoke, fire, and sulfur come out of the horse's mouths and a third of humankind is killed. Those who survive the ordeal still will not repent or cease worshipping idols.

John has now set the reader up for the seventh trumpet. Again, John will intervene with an interlude to bring the reader some important information.

The little scroll. An angel descends from heaven with a scroll in his hand. John is instructed to eat the scroll. The scroll turns sweet in his mouth and sour in his stomach. John is then told to prophesy over people, nations, languages, and kings.

Measure and witness. John is then instructed to measure the temple, altar, and people of God with a measuring device. Two witnesses with intense awesome power are appointed to prophesy. The beast kills the witnesses after they have testified. Their bodies lie in the street for three and one-half days while everyone gloats and makes merriment. The enemies' happiness does not last long because the witnesses are resurrected and ascend to heaven. An earthquake then kills seven-thousand people, and the remaining people do homage to God.

The seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet blows and again the unexpected happens. John takes the reader into heaven again. As the heavenly temple is opened, the ark of the covenant can be seen. Voices of triumph are heard shouting and the twenty-four elders are worshipping God.

John has blown all seven trumpets. The Hebrew writer uses the Old Testament symbolism of the trumpet as an announcement of establishing war in the form of divine judgment. The righteous had been sealed with the seal of the living God, and now they have a task to perform. They are to participate in the divine order by being witnesses to His Word. When the seventh trumpet blows, it produces an occasion for joy, shouting, praise, and thanksgiving. Divine judgment brings about the reign of God.

The Present Conflict

John takes the reader back to earth where the expected seventh trumpet should issue forth the final death knell of the world with cataclysmic events, but the reader must wait for the final judgment. Instead,

John will enlarge on the nature of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.

The woman. John sees a sign in heaven. A pregnant woman is in anguish because she is about to deliver her child. John sees a second sign in heaven. This sign is a dragon with seven heads and ten horns. The dragon is waiting for the child to be born so that he can eat it. The woman gives birth to a male infant whose destiny it is to rule all nations. The dragon is foiled because the child is taken to God and His throne. Meanwhile, the woman finds refuge in the wilderness in a place that had been prepared for her by God.

The dragon. The dragon has already been introduced, but now John wants his readers to know more about him. John transfers the reader to heaven. Going back in time, there was a war between the dragon and his angels and Michael and his angels. The dragon lost the battle and was thrown down to earth. Victory was declared in heaven and Christ came to His rightful rule. The dragon is now on earth, and he is in pursuit of the woman. The woman, however, is safe in the wilderness. Unable to attack the woman, the dragon decides to make war with the rest of the woman's offspring.

The dragon is foiled in his attempt to get the woman and her child; nevertheless, he will attack those who bear testimony to Jesus. In order to do this, the dragon seeks the help of two other beasts. One beast will come from the sea and the other will come from the land.

The beast from the sea. The helper from the sea has ten horns and seven heads. On each horn there are ten diadems, and on each head there is a blasphemous name. The beast looks like a leopard with feet like a bear and a mouth like a lion. The dragon confers upon the beast his power and author-

ity. The world worships and admires the beast and the dragon. The beast blasphemes against God and wages war on His people.

The beast from the earth. The second beast comes out of the earth. It has two horns and speaks like a dragon. It has the same authority as the other beast, and it makes people worship the first beast. He is a miracle worker by which he deludes the world. He has everyone branded with the mark of the beast.

In chapter 12, the war had been won in heaven, and now the dragon is on earth waging his war. He concentrates his war against God's people with the aid of his helpers. They gather people into their fold, and these persons demonstrate their loyalty by having themselves branded. The church, however, is called to witness during this time. In faith and witness, the church will win the battle on earth. Chapters 10-13 constitute the focus of the Apocalypse. As the war was won in heaven; likewise, it will be won on earth. Chapters 4-5 have established God as sovereign and as redeemer. The kingdom will prevail.

Mount Zion. John concludes this section with a vision of vindication for the followers of the Lamb. John transfers back to heaven where he sees the 144,000 who have the name of the Lamb and God written on their foreheads. They are standing before the throne of God singing a song. It is a new song that only these persons can sing. They are all chaste men who were ransomed as the first fruits for God and the Lamb.

Then John sees three angels and each has a message. The first declares that the hour of judgment has come. The second declares the fall of Babylon. The third declares the torment of God's judgment to whomever worships the beast.

The grapes of wrath. John's vision turns to a white cloud. One like a

Son of Man, holding a sickle, sits on a white cloud. He puts His sickle to the earth and reaps the harvest. An angel calls to another angel that he is to gather the earth's grape harvest. The angel puts his sickle to the earth and gathers the earth's grape harvest for God's winepress of wrath. Blood flows for two-hundred miles from the winepress at the height of the horses' bridles.

When the seventh trumpet was blown in chapter 11, heaven shouted for joy. In chapters 12-14, John has given an explanation of the struggle and triumph in which the saints are involved. John will now unfold the final judgment of God in the form of bowls. The salvation of the world and the coming of God's kingdom is made possible through judgment. The Lamb is found worthy to open the seals which blow the trumpets. The seventh trumpet will pour out the final wrath or cups of God's judgment.

The Seven Bowl Judgment

John is still in heaven where he sees another sign. There are seven angels with seven plagues which will consummate the wrath of God.

The seventh trumpet and "The Song of Moses." He then sees a group of people standing beside a sea of glass with fire in it. They are persons who have won the victory over the beast. They are singing "The Song of Moses and the Lamb" in praise to God.

The heavenly Tent of Testimony is opened and seven angels come forth. One of the four living creatures then gives the angels seven bowls of God's wrath. No one can enter the sanctuary until the seven bowls will have been poured out.

The seven bowls. A loud voice instructs the angels to pour out their bowls on the earth. The first bowl creates sores on persons who worshipped the beast. The second bowl turns the sea to blood and everything in it dies. The third bowl turns the rivers and springs to blood. The fourth bowl affects

the sun because it is able to burn the people severely. The fifth bowl causes darkness. The sixth bowl causes the Euphrates River to dry up.

Between the sixth and seventh bowl, the dragon and his two helpers develop three spirits, like frogs, which come forth from their mouths. The evil spirits gather all the kings from the earth for battle against God. They gather at Armageddon.

John finally brings the reader to the long awaited seventh bowl. A cataclysmic event beyond all imagination strikes the earth. An earthquake greater than history has ever recorded shakes the earth. The islands vanish and the mountains disappear. Hail weighing more than one-hundred pounds, thunder, and lightning accompany the earthquake.

The Woman and the Beast

The wrath of God is now complete. The author now wants the reader to understand the dynamics behind the destructive forces. Chapters 17-18 enlarge on the theme of evil and its destruction.

The scarlet woman. John has a vision in which one of the angels takes him into the wilderness to see the judgment on the great harlot. She sits on a throne above the ocean. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her. The woman sits on a beast which has seven heads and ten horns. The woman is clothed in purple and scarlet and wears jewelry of gold and pearls. She holds a golden cup that is full of the obscenities of her fornication. Her identity is written on her forehead as Babylon the Great. The woman is drunk with the blood of God's people.

Identities clarified. John's angel guide reveals the identities of the woman and the beast. The beast is dead, but he has to ascend from the abyss before he will go to perdition. The seven heads are the seven hills that the woman sits on. The seven heads also represent seven kings. Five of the

kings are dead; one is now reigning; another is still to come. The eighth one is the one that was dead. The ten horns are kings that will confer power on the beast. They will declare war on the Lamb, but they will be defeated. The ocean is the people of the earth. The ten horns and beast will hate the harlot and strip her naked. The woman is the city that controls the kings of the earth.

Fall of the scarlet woman. The reader is back on earth with John as he sees an angel declaring the fall of Babylon. All the nations have drunk the wine of her fornication. The kings have committed fornication with her, and the business world has grown affluent from her wealth. Another angel calls for God's people to come out of Babylon so that they do not share in her sins and judgment. Her judgment will be double, and she will be stricken in one day.

Lament and joy. The kings of the earth, who committed fornication with the scarlet woman, will lament in horror because she was destroyed in one hour. Merchants of the earth will mourn because there will be no more cargoes. Traders will weep because all her wealth had been destroyed. The sea traders also will mourn because there will be no more ships.

A mighty angel takes a stone and throws it into the sea indicating that the lot of the great city will be to be hurtled down and never rise again; she is responsible for the blood of the prophets and God's people.

Judgment has been brought on the power that opposes God. The redemptive action of God in history through the Lamb will cause judgment to fall on Babylon and its kings. The many faces of evil and its conglomerate are a devastating power; they will be judged.

Our Lord and God the

Almighty Reigns

When the seventh trumpet blew, heaven shouted that the sovereignty of the world had passed to God and His Christ. The trumpet has poured its bowls to the earth. The saints of God now rejoice at their victory, and John gives the reader a view into the reign of God.

The wedding supper. John goes back to heaven where there is a roaring shout of victory. God is worshipped by a vast throng, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures. There is shouting and joy because the wedding of the Lamb has come. The bride is ready because she has on a clean shining linen dress. There will be joy for those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

King on white horse and army. John transfers to earth. John sees heaven open wide, as well as a Rider on a white horse. The Rider's eyes flame like fire, and He is robed in a garment that is drenched in blood. His army, dressed in clean shining linen, follows Him on white horses. An angel offers an invitation to come to God's supper to eat the flesh of the enemy. The beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gather to do battle with the Rider and His army. The beast and the false prophet are taken prisoner and thrown into the lake of fire. The remaining people are killed by the sword that comes out of the Rider's mouth.

Dragon defeated. An angel comes down from heaven with the key to the abyss in his hand. He seizes the dragon and chains him for one-thousand years.

John then sees persons who had been martyred because they had given testimony to Jesus. These people rise from the dead and reign with the King for one-thousand years. At the end of the one-thousand years, the dragon is

released from the dungeon. Again, he gathers nations from the corners of the earth to march against the people of God. Again, the dragon is defeated because fire comes down from heaven, and the fire destroys his army. The dragon is captured and thrown into the lake of fire with the other two beasts.

The great white throne. John's vision turns to the throne. The dead people are standing before the throne, and books are opened so that everyone can be judged by their deeds. Death, Hades, and all those who are not in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire.

God and His Lamb are victorious over the enemy. Judgment has come to the enemy, and the bride of Christ stands victorious with the Judge. The destiny of the bride is assured because God reigns, and His purpose will be fulfilled.

The Holy City, the New Jerusalem

John takes his audience to the vision of the future circumstances of God's saints. He introduces the readers to the new order established by the reign of God. The cosmos of the future holds a new heaven and a new earth.

New heaven and new earth. John sees a new heaven and a new earth which has no sea. A new holy city, called Jerusalem, comes down from heaven. A loud voice proclaims that now God will dwell among humankind. All things will be made new. God instructs John to write down this prophecy. The people of God will receive the water of life, but the enemies of God will have to suffer in the lake of fire.

The bride, the holy city. John is carried away to a high mountain to view the holy city coming out of heaven. It is radiantly brilliant and clear as crystal. The city has a wall with twelve gates, and each gate is named after a tribe of Israel. The twelve foundation stones of the city are named after

the Apostles. The city, perfectly square, is made of pure gold, and the wall is made of jasper. The foundation of the city is jewelled with precious stones, and the twelve gates are made out of pearl.

There is no temple in the city, and it has no need for the sun or moon. The glory of God and the Lamb give the city its light. The wealth of the nations enters the city, and there is nothing corrupt entering.

A river flows through the city from the throne of God. On each side of the river is a tree of life which yields twelve crops of fruit. The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations.

Epilogue

The Apocalypse closes by stating that the words written in the prophecy are trustworthy. The source of the words is God, who inspires the prophets. The hour of the fulfillment of the prophecy is near. John closes with a benediction.

Summary

The story content of the Book of Revelation has now been surveyed. The reader has now been familiarized with John's message. The story content will enable the reader to be better prepared for the remaining chapters. The next chapter will concern itself with Biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

Biblical Interpretation

John's theology concerns itself with salvation and God's purpose for humankind. Because of the various approaches to Biblical interpretation, clarification is necessary in order to place John's Book in the context of the salvation of the Bible and New Testament.

Hermeneutical Diversity

As one reflects on the interpretation of Scripture, it is apparent that the various forms of interpretation have come from previous forms. In some instances, understanding and interpretations have developed as a reaction to the previous approach.

Reformation to Early

Twentieth-Century

The reformers reacted to the dogma and church tradition that were used to bring the Bible into proper focus. The reformation laid the groundwork for Biblical theology with the basic hermeneutical rule that Scripture should interpret Scripture.

The period of enlightenment saw humankind as the supreme standard. It was able to apply reason to law, science, and art. It followed that the Bible should be put to the test of reason. It was here that the historical and literary methods were developed. The rational reliability and historical credibility of the Bible were questioned.¹

¹ Otto Betz, "Biblical Theology, History of," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 1, 432-37.

Romanticism and idealism followed the enlightenment. Now feeling was introduced and persons could relate to others. The era of idealism contributed to the Biblical theology by engaging the historical philosophical.²

Biblical theology broke into new ground through Ferdinand Baur. He approached the New Testament through history and spiritual consciousness. To Baur, Jesus' teachings formed a foundation for the New Testament. Baur saw them as being expressions of consciousness rather than expressions of theology.³

This approach was met with reaction by conservative theologians. J.C.K. Hofmann stood out as documenting the Bible as saving history which redeemed all humankind. He said that revelation pointed to this and the process will not be understood until the eschaton arrives. He assigned every Book in the Bible to a place in the redemptive theme.⁴

The liberal school attempted to find the historical Jesus. This view was expressed by David Strauss who found Jesus to be a wise man. Strauss did not reconstruct the historical Jesus, but he pointed to the ways in which the Gospels were preserved and paved the way for the Q hypothesis. Liberal scholars interpreted Jesus through rationalistic convictions, historical reconstruction, and the ethics of Jesus. A standard statement of this view was made by Adolf von Harnack who reduced Jesus to a proponent of the harmony between God and man. These men found the historical Jesus to be an ideal moralist and a Galilean peasant.⁵

² Betz, 433.

³ Betz, 433-34.

⁴ Betz, 434.

⁵ Simon J. De Vries, "Biblical Criticism, History of," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 1, 413-18.

The next movement was away from the ethical and historical to the investigation of the religious environment of the Christian community. This movement said that the primitive Christian community was influenced by the surrounding milieu, and it assimilated features from it. W. Wrede protested the view that the Bible was merely a doctrinal system. Christianity was a religion that could not be captured from the Bible alone. The religion of the early Christians was to be understood in light of the surrounding religious environment. Wrede wanted to replace theology with history of religion.⁶

This basic approach was reflected by Albert Schweitzer who believed that Jesus was a Jewish apocalypticist. The risen Christ became the disciples' basis for their eschatology. The significance that was attached to the "resurrection experience" implied that the historical Jesus made references which gave the resurrection the Messianic eschatological meaning.⁷ The eschatology of Jesus can be interpreted by Jewish apocalyptic.⁸ Schweitzer stated, "Historically regarded, the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul are simply the culminating manifestations of Jewish apocalyptic thought."⁹

Rudolf Bultmann

Biblical theology has turned to finding kerygma. This approach has been confronted from two different points of view. One is that of Rudolf Bultmann who finds a discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. The early church proclaimed Christ and faith developed out of the Christian kerygma. The kerygma that proclaimed Jesus Christ, the

⁶ Betz, 435-36.

⁷ Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 345.

⁸ Schweitzer, 367.

⁹ Schweitzer, 367.

crucified and risen Lord, was God's eschatological salvation act.¹⁰ Bultmann states, "He was first so proclaimed in the kerygma of the earliest Church, not in the message of the historical Jesus."¹¹

He interprets the acts of God in history existentially. Bultmann states, "The idea of the omnipresent and almighty God becomes real in my personal existence only by His Word spoken here and now. Accordingly it must be said that the Word of God is what it is only in the moment in which it is spoken."¹² The Word of God does not stem from humankind, but it originates out of history. Bultmann explains the paradox, "For what God has done in Jesus Christ is not a historical fact which is capable of historical proof."¹³ The historian cannot understand the historical person, Jesus, as the Logos or the Word. The framework of the mythological literature of the Bible makes it apparent that the cross and the ministry of Jesus go beyond the understanding of the historian who objectively gathers the data. The historian sees Jesus as a human historical person who came from Nazareth. The objective historian cannot find the act of God in history through Christ. The historian cannot historically find Jesus as the eschatological event.¹⁴ The eschatological event is present in the proclaimed word which happens in the now. Bultmann states, "It is the eschatological once-for-all because the word becomes event here and now in the living voice of the preaching."¹⁵

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1: 3.

¹¹ Bultmann, Theology, 1:3.

¹² Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 79.

¹³ Bultmann, Jesus Christ, 80.

¹⁴ Bultmann, Jesus Christ, 80.

¹⁵ Bultmann, Jesus Christ, 82.

In order to find the kerygma, Biblical theology must demythologize the world view of the Bible. New Testament cosmology is mythical. Its universe is a three-storied earth, heaven, and underworld. The earth is a place of supernatural activity of angels, God, and demons. The end of the world will come quickly through cataclysmic forces. The dead will rise and judgment will have taken place. This language of mythology can be traced to Jewish apocalyptic and Gnostic redemption myths.¹⁶ Bultmann explains, "To this extent the kerygma is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete."¹⁷ Bultmann asks whether the preacher should expect his listeners to accept the mythical world view as well as the kerygma. He answers the question by asserting that the New Testament embodies theological truth. Biblical theology must divest itself from the mythological world in which it is cast or demythologize it.¹⁸

Bultmann understands Jesus' prominent message as the reign of God. Jesus' message reflects the milieu of His time in that the apocalyptic literature of His day looked for salvation through a cosmic intervention where catastrophe will eliminate present conditions. The new aeon will replace the old aeon, the world will be judged, the dead will be resurrected, and the Son of Man will come on a cloud. Bultmann points out that Jesus refrains from these apocalyptic speculations and there are very few apocalyptic references in His words. Jesus' main thrust points to the reign of God.¹⁹

¹⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 1: 1-3.

¹⁷ Bultmann, "New Testament Mythology," 3.

¹⁸ Bultmann, "New Testament Mythology," 3.

¹⁹ Bultmann, Theology, 1:4-5.

C. H. Dodd

The other approach to the kerygmatic interpretation is that of C. H. Dodd. The New Testament is a unified statement of kerygma. The Pauline kerygma is a partial statement of the common Gospel.²⁰ It proclaims "the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ in an eschatological setting which gives significance to the facts. They mark the transition from 'this evil Age' to the 'Age to Come'."²¹ The fact that Christ died and rose becomes important because the Old Testament prophets looked to future events in the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord has prophetically been fulfilled. Christ died and rose, and this indicates that the age to come has arrived. The fulfillment of prophecy is complete in the death and resurrection. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, the believers are delivered from the present evil age and Christ is Lord of the present new age. Christ will come as Judge and Savior at the end of this age.²²

The Fourth Gospel is somewhat different; Christianity is in the moment when Christ draws humankind to Himself, and eternal life is already owned by the believer. Future eschatological reference is seldom used. The author does not turn his back on the original kerygma, but he turns eschatology into fulfillment within history.²³

Oscar Cullmann

The kerygmatic approach becomes much different by the salvation his-

²⁰ Charles Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), 14.

²¹ Dodd, Apostolic, 13.

²² Dodd, Apostolic, 13.

²³ Charles Dodd, Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1954), 7.

tory interpretation of Scripture. This approach to Biblical theology is captured by Oscar Cullmann. The salvation history perspective begins in the Old Testament. Cullmann asserts, "The New Testament's progressive completion of the salvation-historical kerygma continues the process begun in the Old Testament"²⁴ The Old Testament understanding of salvation history unfolds as each new event is encountered in the present. Cullmann states, "In the Old Testament the complete understanding of the divine plan evolves in the relation to new events in the present and sometimes passes through far-reaching changes."²⁵ The New Testament continues the same process by developing the kerygma in relationship to each new event. There is a continuous ongoing development of salvation history which shows a unity of both Testaments.²⁶

The Biblical writers who interpret the kerygma make no distinction between the historical and the mythical interpretation. It then becomes difficult to distinguish between myth and history. This difficulty inclines the exegete to ignore the historical only to concentrate on the kerygma. One cannot ignore history because kerygma is not finished. The kerygma will be absorbed into the new event and history becomes absorbed in the kerygma in each new event.²⁷

The New Testament continues with the development of kerygma and event. The new event is assimilated into the old kerygma and the old kerygma is reinterpreted. There is, however, not only a double kerygma but

²⁴ Oscar Cullmann, Salvation in History, trans. Sidney Sowers (London: SCM Press, 1967), 87.

²⁵ Cullmann, Salvation, 87.

²⁶ Cullmann, Salvation, 98.

²⁷ Cullmann, Salvation, 93-94.

also a double event to consider. The new event, together with the central Christ event, encounters both the Jesus kerygma and the Old Testament kerygma.

The first witnesses of the new event or resurrection are also witnesses of kerygma. The new events after the resurrection are linked with present events that they witness in the life of Jesus. As eyewitnesses, the Apostles would create a continuity between event and kerygma. They witness that the exalted Christ and the incarnate Jesus is the same. Interpretation of the event occurs along with the event. The events that are witnessed and their interpretations are difficult for them to conceive as reality.²⁸

The disciples, however, are able to understand the full significance of what had happened because they are witnesses to the event and Jesus' kerygma. As new events occur, they are able to relate to this and reinterpret the kerygma. The close association of the Jesus kerygma and the reinterpretation makes it difficult to find the difference between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the kerygma.²⁹

The Old Testament and the literature of late Judaism are characterized by eschatology. The imminent end is expected.³⁰ Cullmann explains the New Testament characteristic, "The new element in the New Testament is not eschatology, but what I call the tension between the decisive 'already fulfilled' and the 'not yet completed,' between present and future."³¹ The whole kerygma of Jesus and New Testament demonstrates

²⁸ Cullmann, Salvation, 102-03.

²⁹ Cullmann, Salvation, 102-04.

³⁰ Cullmann, Salvation, 172.

³¹ Cullmann, Salvation, 172.

this. What is referred to as the expectation of the imminent end is only a symptom. The "already" elicits the enthusiasm of the early church. This is what separates the early church from Judaism. This means that salvation history is the basis of the New Testament.³²

Interpretations Compared

The following will compare the views of Bultmann, Cullmann, Dodd, and Schweitzer. It will deal with the issues of salvation, time, decision, demythologizing, kingdom, and the early church.

Bultmann and Cullmann

Bultmann's and Cullmann's approach to the issues of salvation, time, kingdom, decision, and demythologizing is in disagreement. Bultmann finds the acts of God active as an existential experience, while Cullmann finds a continuous development of salvation throughout history.

Existential meaning. Bultmann disagrees with Cullmann on the issue of salvation history. To Bultmann, the acts of God in history that denote an act of God in an objective sense have meaning only existentially. An objective act of God speaks only to the existentially concerned person. Humankind lives in time and space, and the objective act of God speaks only in the present moment.³³ Bultmann states, "This event, our being addressed by God here and now, our being questioned, judged, and blessed by Him is what we mean when we speak of an act of God."³⁴ God encounters His people in His Word. He constantly encounters His people, but He cannot be seen unless the

³² Cullmann, Salvation, 172-73.

³³ Rudolf Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies to His Critics," Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 1: 196.

³⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies," 196-97.

Word accompanies time and space; this makes the moment revelatory.³⁵ God has acted in Christ, but this fact cannot be verified historically. Jesus, as the Word of God, cannot be proven by the historian. The New Testament describes the person and work of Christ in mythological terms which should not be understood in terms of world history. History and the historian do not expose Christ as who He really is in the act of God. It is through faith that Christ is the eschatological event in the present moment. This eschatological event is reenacted in the proclamation of the word in the present moment.³⁶ When the Bible is demythologized, "the Christian doctrine of incarnation, of the word that 'was made flesh' is precisely this, that God manifests himself not merely as the idea of God but as 'my' God, who speaks to me here and now, through a human mouth."³⁷

Kerygma and history. Cullmann's approach to salvation history is marked by the close relationship of kerygma and history. The kerygma develops in history as each event progressively reinterprets kerygma. The events of salvation history take place within a historical framework. In the Old Testament, this can be seen in Israel's history and its linkage with other peoples and empires. In the New Testament, the concern shifts to all people; but the framework of history is in relationship to Rome, Caesar, governors, and proconsuls.³⁸

Bultmann, however, separates history and kerygma. The kerygma must

³⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies," 206-07.

³⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, "Bultmann Replies," 207-09.

³⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Case for Demythologizing: A Reply," Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, trans. Reginald H. Fuller, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 1962), 2: 193.

³⁸ Cullmann, Salvation, 152-53.

be separated from the mythological framework in which it is placed. The historian cannot understand the kerygma within world history. The demythologized Word becomes applicable when it is taken out of its historical setting. The nonhistorical meaning of the Word is interpreted, and it is applicable to the existential now.

Time. The difference in the historical approach that is held by Cullmann and Bultmann gives rise to different perspectives of time. Cullmann's concept of time takes place along a redemptive time line which embraces the past, present, and future. The now for Cullmann becomes linked to past, present, and future. In the New Testament, the now becomes situated in a boundary between the ascension and Christ's return, and it takes into consideration the whole salvation history of the Old Testament. Every now is bound up with the past and future through the death and resurrection of Christ.³⁹ Because the end time has already been inaugurated by the Easter event, there is a tension between the completed past and the uncompleted future.

Bultmann's discontinuity between history and kerygma only allows him to interpret the acts of God existentially in the present moment. The Easter stories should not be taken for more than signs, pictures, and confessions of the Easter faith. The fourth Gospel writer blends the parousia into Easter and Pentecost. The eschatological inferences of these are one event.⁴⁰ Bultmann states, "But the one event that is meant by all these is not an external occurrence, but an inner one; the victory which Jesus wins when

³⁹ Cullmann, Salvation, 169.

⁴⁰ Bultmann, Theology, 2:57.

faith arises in man by the overcoming of the offense that Jesus is to him."⁴¹ The victory over Satan now exists in faith and the salvation drama of the incarnation to the parousia is one event.⁴² The salvation drama of past, present, and future finds its expression in the existential present moment of faith. The resurrection faith is not concerned with the historical. History can only explain faith from the standpoint of personal knowledge of Jesus and the consequent post-resurrection subjective visions. Then as now, Easter faith is the eschatological redemptive event. The kerygma demands faith and it confronts humankind. Through preaching, the death and resurrection are the eschatological now.⁴³

Kingdom. Bultmann's and Cullmann's disagreement on time results in different interpretations of the kingdom. To Bultmann, the kingdom becomes a deliverance because the kingdom requires decision. The kingdom of God is the eschatological deliverance which ends earthly values. It demands the person to make a decision. The kingdom confronts the individual as an either or decision.⁴⁴ Every hour is the last hour in which the individual is called to decision in the present. The kingdom is not an event on the time line, but rather, a present decision necessitated by human nature. The kingdom does not begin at a point in time in history and go to fulfillment; it is a present decision.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Bultmann, Theology, 2:57.

⁴² Bultmann, Theology, 2:57.

⁴³ Bultmann, "New Testament Mythology," 42.

⁴⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 35.

⁴⁵ Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, 51.

In contrast, Cullmann sees the kingdom as being a period of time in which the Christian hope comes into fulfillment based on historical fact. The incarnation changes the concept of future time for the new Christians. The future age of salvation and the coming of the Messiah are in the past and present. The Jewish hope no longer exists, but rather, the Christian hope is now based on historical fact. The future hope is now vivid and intense because the future is based on a solid fact that has already been established in the future. The imminent end which is now rooted in the Easter event intensifies the expectation of the kingdom.⁴⁶ The kingdom is at hand means that it has drawn near with Christ, and God's people are now in the final period of time which is brought into existence by the incarnation.⁴⁷

Decision. While Bultmann and Cullmann both agree that decision is significant for salvation and the kingdom, the approach stems from two different perspectives. Bultmann contends for existential decision in the now, while Cullmann argues for decision to be based on salvation history. Cullmann states that the New Testament places emphasis on present salvation. Salvation, however, is related to the past, the future, and the decisive Christ event. One enters into the saving process in relationship to the past and the future and they have an effect on the present. The decisions for salvation take place on a time line in the present period of salvation history.⁴⁸

Bultmann, however disagrees, "The salvation-occurrence is no-where

⁴⁶ Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 81-88.

⁴⁷ Oscar Cullmann, The Early Church, trans. A. B. Higgins and S. Godman (London: SCM Press, 1956), 153.

⁴⁸ Cullmann, Salvation, 170.

present except in the proclaiming, accosting, demanding, and promising word of preaching."⁴⁹ References to historical accounts in the past do not make salvation visible. Salvation becomes eschatological because it constantly takes place in the present rather than in history. In the proclamation, God encounters the hearer in the now, and the preached kerygma creates the now of the eschatological event.⁵⁰

Demythologizing. Bultmann argues for demythologizing the Word so that it can be isolated from its mythological stumbling block. This clarifies the meaning for faith; thus, the Word can lead to decision.⁵¹ Cullmann in opposition cautions against demythologizing. Primal history and end history as well as salvation history contain mythological materials. Primal history and end history go beyond time, and they enter into the category of myth.⁵² They speak to the human condition rather than the historical event. Myth communicates through the features of the event. When a myth is demythologized, it eliminates the event and reduces the myth to existential understanding.⁵³ The primal and end myths are historically outside of history, but they are connected to the center of redemptive history fixed around the life and death of Jesus. When integrated with redemptive history, the myths stand on the same ground with redemptive history and extend it in both direc-

⁴⁹ Bultmann, Theology, 1:302.

⁵⁰ Bultmann, Theology, 1:302.

⁵¹ Bultmann, "Case," 183.

⁵² Oscar Cullmann, "The Connection of Primal Events and End Events with the New Testament Redemptive History," Old Testament and Christian Faith, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 116.

⁵³ Cullmann, "Connection," 117.

tions. In order for the myths to be able to extend central history toward the beginning and the end, they must be historicized. The early Christians demythologized primal and end history by lengthening salvation history. The primal and end histories are connected with the center history, and this gives the beginning and end a redemptive historical significance. The myth is no longer myth because it is interpreted within the historical event. The meaning of the myth is found in its relationship to the redemptive event.⁵⁴ Cullmann cautions, "The Biblical writers have already successfully demythologized the myths by historicizing them, and we must be careful not to disregard this fact."⁵⁵

Bultmann, Schweitzer and,

Cullmann

Schweitzer comes into conflict with both Bultmann and Cullmann. Salvation is bound to an ethical ideal which was given in Jesus' teachings. To Schweitzer, the kingdom is a spiritual and ethical community.

Eschatological event. For Bultmann, the kingdom of God is the eschatological decision in the present moment. It can be disputed whether Jesus thought that the kingdom of God was imminent with His person. That Jesus understood the present to be the time of decision is not disputed. The time arrives in His person for humankind to take note of His message.⁵⁶ The New Testament shows that Jesus is the eschatological event, and He is the end of the old world. Through preaching, the eschatological event becomes

⁵⁴ Cullmann, "Connection," 119-20.

⁵⁵ Cullmann, "Connection," 122.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1958), 31-32.

present again and again through faith. The old world comes to an end in Christ as the individual becomes a new creature in Christ.⁵⁷

Cullmann agrees with Bultmann that Christ is the eschatological event, but the kingdom does not become an existential meaning which is based on the eschatological event. Cullmann places the Easter event as the midpoint in salvation history. The Christian hope now rests on past history. The end time has come in which the future hope is constantly in tension with the present. The Easter event ushers in the kingdom where the final phase of future expectation rests on the already and the not yet.

Schweitzer disagrees with both Bultmann and Cullmann. To Schweitzer the Easter event is neither an existential eschatological event or the eschatological event in salvation history. He finds that the expectation of the kingdom was never fulfilled and the kingdom that Jesus expected in the imminent future never materialized. To Schweitzer, the eschatological delay that was encountered by the disciples is of great consequence for the Gospel because the mission of the disciples then became obscure as to meaning. In Matthew 10, Jesus expects the parousia of the son of man, and He expects the arrival of the kingdom before the disciples return from their journey.⁵⁸ This failed expectation has influenced the whole history of Christianity. Christianities' history is based on the non-occurrence of the parousia and the consequent abandonment of eschatology. The first postponement of the parousia begins with Matthew, chapter 10, and the progress of "de-eschatologising" is a continuing process.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Bultmann, Jesus Christ, 80-81.

⁵⁸ Albert Schweitzer, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 167.

⁵⁹ Schweitzer, Quest, 360.

Kingdom of God. Like Bultmann, Schweitzer puts the kingdom of God in a faith and existential perspective, but He differs in that the kingdom of God is realized in the world through spiritualized understanding. It is not the kerygma that demands faith, but rather it must be understood that the historical Jesus speaks through the world view of His time. Jesus does not present a fully spiritualized view of the kingdom of God because it cannot be understood by His contemporaries. Jesus spiritualizes the concept of the kingdom of God in His idealism and ethics. In time, this changes the concept of the kingdom. The modern faith can find the kingdom of God in the Spirit who came with Jesus. Modern faith is summoned to faith in the kingdom. This faith makes a big demand and requires belief in an impossible miracle. There is no possibility of the kingdom of God coming into the world without the kingdom being an inward manifestation.⁶⁰ Schweitzer states, "Nothing can be achieved without inwardness. The Spirit of God will only strive against the spirit of the world when it has won its victory over that spirit in our hearts."⁶¹

Ethics. For Schweitzer, salvation is bound up with humankind's cooperation with the ethics of Jesus. This opposes Cullmann's activity of God in salvation history and Bultmann's existential faith in the interpretation of the Word. The newness of life does not look for the coming eschatological event, but rather the kingdom of God is spiritual and ethical, and it has no relationship to the last things. The kingdom of God is realized through the ethics and spirituality of humankind.

⁶⁰ E. N. Mozley and Albert Schweitzer, The Theology of Albert Schweitzer (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1950), 105-07.

⁶¹ Mozley and Schweitzer, 108.

Time. Schweitzer's concept of redemptive time becomes a realized eschatology which is based on looking to the teachings of Jesus and enforcing His ethics. As the kingdom of God is understood as ethics and spirituality rather than something to be expected in the future, the kingdom can be realized.⁶² This opposes Cullmann's redemptive time line which embraces the past, present, and future. Schweitzer concurs with Bultmann's deliverance in the now. The difference is that Bultmann's deliverance has value existentially; whereas Schweitzer's brings an ethical kingdom into the world.

First Christians. Cullmann's approach to finding kerygma in history argues that the first Christians answered the questions about Jesus from historical facts. These facts came from the life, ministry, and death of Jesus. The first Christians worked out their Christology in various ways, arriving at one common denominator.⁶³ Cullmann affirms that the first Christians understood "Christology as a redemptive history which extends from creation to the eschatological new creation, the center of which is the earthly life of Jesus Christ."⁶⁴

Cullmann understands that the early church had to work out the connection between the first coming and the second coming. It was the first coming that presented the theological problem. The coming of the Son of Man had to be connected with the earthly life of Jesus. Salvation history interpreted this into meaning from real history.⁶⁵ Salvation history placed the

⁶² Mozley and Schweitzer, 101.

⁶³ Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 316-17.

⁶⁴ Cullmann, Christology, 317.

⁶⁵ Cullmann, Christology, 319.

Christ event at the center, and this allowed Christians to view Christ from creation through reconciliation to the new creation where Christ is been continuously at work.⁶⁶

In contrast, Schweitzer says that Jesus' eschatology was influenced by the apocalyptic book of Daniel which was to be brought about by the Son of Man. The kingdom of God was a synthesis between prophetic ethics and the apocalyptic book of Daniel.⁶⁷ Jesus expected the parousia of the son of man and the arrival of the kingdom before the disciples returned from their journey. This did not happen.⁶⁸ Jesus proclaimed a new morality for the early church as an interim ethic before the arrival of the kingdom.⁶⁹ This ethic of repentance was "a moral renewal in prospect of the accomplishment of universal perfection in the future."⁷⁰ Jesus, the apocalypticist, died forcing the kingdom to come.⁷¹ The early church merely held that the death and resurrection of Jesus made it possible for the kingdom to come, and they would wait for it.⁷² From the second generation onward, the kingdom was advanced into the future. Originally, it was the center of faith, and it gradually fell into the background as one of the articles of faith among many.⁷³

⁶⁶ Cullmann, Christology, 324.

⁶⁷ Schweitzer, Mystery, 67.

⁶⁸ Schweitzer, Quest, 359-60.

⁶⁹ Schweitzer, Mystery, 53-56.

⁷⁰ Schweitzer, Mystery, 53.

⁷¹ Schweitzer, Quest, 398.

⁷² Mozley & Schweitzer, 82.

⁷³ Mozley & Schweitzer, 82.

Bultmann, Cullmann, Dodd,
and Schweitzer

In contrast to Bultmann's kingdom of God as a present existential decision, Dodd interprets the kerygma to say that the kingdom has come into a realized experience. His interpretation is more in keeping with Cullmann in that the kingdom is already present. Dodd, however, does not consider the tension of the future with the present as Cullmann does because the future has moved into the present.

Realized kingdom. Dodd totally disagrees with Schweitzer about Jesus teaching the imminence of the kingdom. Rather, Jesus states the kingdom has come. Jesus proclaims that the hope of the people has finally arrived. The kingdom of God is not imminent, it is here. Those who interpret Jesus' teachings as a thorough eschatology are teaching a compromise. The declarations which say the kingdom has come are explicit and distinctive, and remove the eschatological expectation.⁷⁴ Dodd states, "The eschaton has moved from the future to the present, from the sphere of expectation into that of realized experience."⁷⁵ The future speculations of the apocalyptic writers are now a concrete experience.⁷⁶ There is no blissful eschatology in Jesus sayings. The future holds no promise of a perfected Utopia. He simply declares that the kingdom is here. When He speaks of the kingdom as a future entity, He speaks of it as a world beyond this one.⁷⁷ Persons who accept the kingdom are part of the new age in which the grace and judgment

⁷⁴ Charles Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 33-34.

⁷⁵ Dodd, Parables, 34.

⁷⁶ Dodd, Parables, 34.

⁷⁷ Dodd, Parables, 54-55.

of God stand revealed. There is no need for an interim ethic, but there is a moral ideal for the new age people who now live in the revealed presence of God's judgment and grace.⁷⁸

Eschatological event. Dodd disagrees with Bultmann that the acts of God in history have meaning only existentially. He also disagrees with Schweitzer's assertion that the kingdom has no relationship to an eschatological event. While ethics are necessary for Dodd, the kingdom is not brought about by the ethical ideal. Dodd concurs with Cullmann that God acts in history with the decisive act being the Easter event. History is a process of redemption where its beginning and end reside in God. The beginning and end are not events in time, but rather, between beginning and end God's purpose is fulfilled. Between beginning and end lie the death and resurrection of Christ, and this event gives history its meaning of salvation history.⁷⁹ This history finds a relationship in Old and New Testaments. The New Testament writers interpret the Old Testament with an understanding of history which is held by the prophets showing the history of the people of God has God's plan at work in it. This disclosed pattern of the Old Testament is brought to light by the New Testament writers in the Gospel story.⁸⁰ Expectation is characteristic of the Old Testament; whereas the New Testament takes over the theme of eschatology and states that the expectation has taken place. The fulfillment of the expectation takes place in the eschatological event which is the death and resurrection of Christ.

⁷⁸ Dodd, Parables, 84.

⁷⁹ Charles Dodd, History and the Gospel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 171-72.

⁸⁰ Charles Dodd, According to the Scriptures (Welwyn, Herts: James Nisbet, 1961), 128.

This unique and final event is the act in which God intervened to bring His kingdom on earth.⁸¹

The early church. Dodd disagrees with Schweitzer that the kingdom of God was a synthesis between apocalyptic and ethics, but he agrees that the early church gradually changed their immediate eschatological expectations. Dodd sees the change of the church's understanding to be that the new age had dawned in Christ rather than being an outworking of Schweitzer's ethics and spirituality. Dodd agrees with Cullmann that the early church understood redemptive history had come into their midst. The early church was keenly aware that they were living in a new age. They knew that the kingdom of God had come into their midst. The testimony can be seen in Acts, Paul, Hebrews, and the Fourth Gospel that it was living in the new age. God had acted in history, and the new age had come. The early church, however, may have had a sense of living in a crisis; but as the years passed, the crisis also passed. The expectation of His return did not come to pass. Under the guidance of Paul and the writer of the Fourth Gospel, meanings were put into perspective; accordingly, the early church gradually became less concerned with eschatological expectations.⁸² They concerned themselves with the knowledge that God had come into their midst and redeemed them. This conviction was held throughout the whole New Testament where the writers employed eschatological language to state that the eschaton had to come into human experience through the act of God. The parousia did not occur; consequently the early Christian thought was a result of their readjustment.⁸³

⁸¹ Dodd, History, 35.

⁸² Dodd, Parables, 103-04.

⁸³ Dodd, Apostolic, 33-35.

Apocalypticism and the Kerygma

The hermeneutical diversity has approached apocalyptic symbolism and themes through various ways. The discontinuity of kerygma and history prefers to demythologize the world view of the Bible so that the kerygma is valid for existential meaning. Kerygma that is interpreted through the historical event requires the mythological to be historicized, so that its meaning is found in relationship to the event. The history of religions school of thought finds Christianity informed by apocalyptic. Schweitzer finds Jesus to be an ardent student of apocalyptic who preaches the imminence of the kingdom. When it does not materialize, He dies forcing it to come. This interpretation does not allow the kerygmatic message to change the apocalyptic symbolism into meaning that expresses the realized eschaton which has entered the world through the salvation act of God in history.

Apocalyptic Language

The New Testament freely uses apocalyptic language in order to express the New Testament kerygma. The historical Easter event which creates the core of the New Testament kerygma is apocalyptic. The language which surrounds the event and its related kerygma is often expressed in apocalyptic symbol and theme by the New Testament writers. The following are examples of apocalyptic themes which are expressed by New Testament writers in order to present New Testament theology:

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18).

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:14).

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power (Mark 9:1).

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:27).

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matt. 12:28).

And have tested the goodness of Word of God and the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:5).

He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him (Rom. 6:8).

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory (Mark 13:26).

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us (2 Tim. 2:12).

Truly, I say unto you, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).

And He has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man (John 5:27).

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17).

Salvation Historical Deliverance

In the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, salvation is brought about by the activity of God in the history of humankind. Humankind is not saved by wisdom, and mysticism; rather, it is saved by the act of God

in and through the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This makes the Christian message kerygma rather than ethics, mysticism, or law. The kerygma proclaims liberation. The life, death, and resurrection is God's saving act. Christ's willingness to die and be born in human history is humankind's salvation. It is through Christ's willingness to enter the human condition that the relationship between God and humankind is restored. Lost humankind is saved by His mission. The saving act of God not only involves a sinful humankind, but also the whole cosmos is involved in the liberation or restoration.⁸⁴

Salvation History Hymn

This reflection of the Old and New Testament is found in the Apocalypse where John gives this meaning of salvation in his heavenly choric hymns. They highlight the Apocalypse with explanation by taking the reader into heavenly worship, and they give insight into the past and the future.

Past salvation. The first salvation song is sung by the vast throng which no one can number. They are those who can wear the white robes that have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb. The throng shouts that salvation belongs to God and the Lamb (7:10). The church can come through the great ordeal triumphantly in victory. The triumph is made possible through God's act in the past so that in the future all tears will be wiped from their eyes. Salvation and the New Jerusalem are not possible through humankind's own efforts.

Present salvation. John shows his readers the precise hour of God's victory which was when Christ came to His rightful rule (12:10). The Accuser of humankind is overthrown. The conquering victory of humankind can now

⁸⁴ Alan Richardson, "Salvation, Savior," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, 168-81.

be possible through the sacrifice of the Lamb. Michael and his angels have thrown Satan out of heaven, as a result he deceives and accuses on earth with great fury because his time is short. This earthly power of evil can be overcome by testimony of the saints and the Lamb's sacrifice.

Future salvation. After Babylon falls, the heavenly chorus shouts a song of salvation. Salvation, glory, and power belong to God because His judgments are true and just (19:2). When God enters into his reign, judgment will have been carried out against all evil. God has triumphed over evil through Christ, and all of creation are now in the process of being restored. God's power and glory will be dwelling among humankind in the future. From Genesis to Revelation, God is seeking to restore His people to Himself. The sin that has entered God's good world is removed through God's justice and truthfulness, and God's cosmos will be free from the bondage of sin. When humankind is purged of evil, it will see God's face, and this is the salvation plan of God.

Summary

This chapter has shown the various methods of Biblical interpretation. It has shown that from the reformation until the present day there has been a diversity in Biblical scholarship. It has shown that there is not a unified system by which the Scriptures can be understood. God's witness to Himself through Scripture has come through a great variety of writers that had their own unique style. This has not made the task of Biblical interpretation simple. This chapter has touched upon the recent scholarship that interprets Scripture through kerygma, kerygma in history, and history of religions. These various methods result in a variety of ways in which salvation, time, decision, demythologizing, the kingdom, and the early church are viewed. These have been compared to give the reader more insight into the different methods.

The Book of Revelation specifically belongs to the genre of apocalyptic. The apocalyptic language used in the Old Testament and other apocalyptic writing is found in the New Testament. The interpretational diversity approaches the symbolism of apocalyptic differently. Apocalyptic symbolism and themes are found in the New Testament and they express the kerygma of the New Testament when mythological language is interpreted through the historical event. The New Testament writers use apocalyptic symbol in order to present New Testament theology.

This chapter focused on the choric hymns in the Apocalypse to show John's meaning of salvation. It reflects the salvation history of the Old and New Testament that is brought about by the activity of God in history.

The next chapter will categorize the theology of the Apocalypse under the subjects of humankind, God, and Christ.

CHAPTER 6

Theology

This chapter will concern itself with the systematic and Biblical theology of the Book of Revelation. A methodological approach to the theology of the Book enables the exegete to understand and think more clearly about the issues of faith that the Book addresses. Systematic theology asks the questions of the text that answers the theological inquiry. The answers are embedded and rooted in the Biblical theology of the Book. It is the task of systematic theology to ask coherent questions in the light of the revelation that the Biblical writer has given. Because this Book, as any other Book of the Bible, does not give clear statements of systematic theology, the chapter will examine John's Book in the light of theological answers. It will attempt to delineate John's doctrine of Christ, God, and humankind. This methodology gives rise to statements of interpretation which give the food for the homiletical discourse. These hermeneutical statements are the Biblical theology that is applied to the contemporary questions that are asked and answered in the normative situation. Systematic theology brings the theology of the writer and the world view of today into sharper focus.

The literary historical component and the literary aspects comprise only one aspect of interpretation. Since the Bible is literature and expresses itself in words which are merely symbols, it is necessary to align the gap between the Biblical writer and the contemporary scene through a critical historical analysis. The historical and the literary are enmeshed in the theological statements. The author has given theological truth in his

apocalyptic genre. His message is conveyed in a dynamic written form of cartoon caricature. Through kaleidoscopic metaphorical drama, John brings to his readers a Biblical theology which reflects the New Testament and the salvation history of the whole Bible. The hermeneutics of both the historical criticism and the theological statements are enablers for valid application of God's revelation to contemporary faith. The Sunday morning exegete must enter into dialog with both hermeneutical aspects in order for the text to have meaning in everyday living.

The Lamb

The Christology of the Apocalypse is portrayed through various images. The many images from Judge to the slain Lamb show Christ in His exalted state.

The Exalted Christ

The Book is the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. The Revelation unveils Christ in His exalted being. He is referred to as One like a Son of Man (1:13; 14:14). The Messianic designation from the Book of Daniel comes forward in the Apocalypse to describe the risen Christ. His eyes flame like fire; His feet gleam as though they are refined in a furnace, and a two-edged sword comes from His mouth. His face shines like the sun, and His voice sounds like a roar (1:14-16). The Apocalypse displays Christ in His glorified state. The reader is now confronted with the majesty and power of the reigning King.

The Son of Man identifies Himself as the First, Last, and Living One. He was dead; He is alive forever; He holds the keys to death and Hades (1:18). His overarching power over history is focused in His marks of slaughter (5:6). He has conquered through being slain; and now He is the Firstborn of the dead, the Loyal Witness, and the Ruler over the kings of the earth (1:5). The Lamb has conquered and will conquer because He is King of kings and Lord of

lords (17:14; 19:16). He is destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron (12:5).

Coronation Ceremony

The coronation ceremony can take place because the Lamb is able to take the scroll from the One who sits on the throne (5:7). His conquering battle scars are visible (5:6). As soon as the slain Lamb takes the scroll out of the right hand of God, the whole universe joins in a new song (5:7ff). The Lamb is the conquering King, and because of His victory, all of creation can rejoice in a new song. The new song can be sung, and the enthronement of the Lamb can take place because He has ransomed people of every tongue, tribe, and nation for God. Through the victory and enthronement, the King creates a royal house of priests who reign on earth (5:9-10).

The Lion as Lamb

The Messianic hope of the Old Testament is brought forward in the Apocalypse as a reality in the present (5:5). The Lion of the tribe of Judah and the root of David overcomes the powers of darkness by His once-and-for-all act in history. The traditional image of the Old Testament Lion is renewed into the image of the slain Lamb. The New Testament slain Lamb is God's power and victory. The defenseless slain Lamb earns the right to open the scroll and its seals.

The Apocalypse takes this power and creates an image of a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. The Lamb's power and strength enable Him to triumph over opposition (5:6). The slain Messiah, who is presented in the image of the Lamb, brings together a nation of priests who will eventually live in a city that is free from evil (21:27). The powerful Lamb conquers through His victory at the cross, and that power brings the new aeon. That power will fulfill the Messianic hope.

The High Priest

John's theology also presents Christ as the passover Lamb. The sacrifice of the slain Lamb purchases for God a people from all nations. By His sacrifice, the Lamb frees God's people from the bondage of sin. The conquering Lamb is a willing sacrifice that leads His people out of bondage into the promised land in order to make them into a kingdom of priests who will reign on earth (1:5-6; 5:9-10). Through their priestly functions the kingdom will come on earth as the Lamb reigns as their High Priest. He is garbed in a High Priest's garment presenting the image of power as a sharp two-edged sword protrudes from His mouth (1:13-16).

The Lamb as Judge

The Messianic Judge is the interpretive solution to history. The purpose of God is now revealed in present history as being determined from the very beginning of the created order (13:8). The suffering Messiah is transformed into the image of a strong Lamb who wins the right to take the scroll from the One who sits on the throne (5:7). Redemption and salvation of the world come through judgment because the Lamb conquers and is able to open the seals. As the seals are broken, the kingdom of God comes into fulfillment. Christ's judgment from the cross brings victory for the kingdom and judgment on all opposition. The future hope of the world necessitates the negation of evil through judgment. Through His judgment, the people of God will be vindicated, and they will be able to sing a song of victory (6:10; 7:10). When God's purpose will come into fulfillment as Christ metes out His divine judgment, the sovereignty of the world will pass to our Lord and His Christ (11:15). His judgments are just and true, and He will fulfill His promise of salvation by returning to put all evil under submission (19:11ff).

God

The Apocalypse's main themes concerning God are holiness, righteousness, omnipotence, sovereignty, justice, and everlastingness.

God created a good universe, but corruption has invaded the created order. The Apocalypse personifies the evil that penetrates His creation. John explains evil through vivid imagery and the demonic trinity.

Holy, Righteous

The Old Testament concept of the Holy and righteous God is brought forward into the Apocalypse. The four angels of the angelic court announce God's omnipotence, holiness, and eternal quality. "The Song of Moses" reveals that God alone is holy, and His ways are just and true (15:4). The angel announces that the Holy One is just in His judgments (16:5). The Holy One is just in His judgments as His wrath is poured out onto the earth (16:1-5). God's condemnation on corruption brings forth a victory shout because His judgments have been true and just (19:2). God's truthfulness is revealed in His just action and character. As a holy and righteous God, He has acted and will act in history to intervene in the world's injustice to bring about the kingdom of God. God's truthful character requires action by intervening in the sinful condition of the world through judgment by the Lamb (6:17). God intervenes in history through His redemptive purpose of salvation (12:10-12). The Old Testament concept of God's righteousness as justice is now manifested through the work of the slain Lamb (5:9-10).

Everlasting and Omnipotent

The sovereign Lord is the Alpha and Omega; and the One who was, is, and is to come (1:8). The elders address the Lord God Almighty as the One who is and was (11:17). The One who sits on the throne lives forever and

seven bowls are filled with the wrath of God who lives forever and ever (15:7). The sovereign God exists in history, and He acts by His mighty deeds to provide the movement of history with a purpose. God transcends the present to bring the past and the future into dynamic action in the present. The time for delay is past, and the mystery of God will be accomplished (10:7).

The unlimited authority and power of God are expressed as the sovereign Lord of all (4:8). God is worshipped in thanksgiving as the sovereign God over all (11:17). In "The song of Moses," God is sovereign over all (15:3). God in His justice is sovereign over all (16:7). The sovereign God treads the winepress of wrath (19:15). This just sovereignty is observed by humanity as the kingdom comes on earth. God is sovereign, but He will not reign until all enemies are defeated. God is sovereign, but His full reign is in the future. God's sovereignty has already defeated evil, but the future is characterized by the struggle of the reign of God with the demonic authority. When rebellion and evil are defeated through judgment, the sovereignty of God will be visible in its full reign. The future holds the promise that there will be no need for a temple because a temple will be unneeded in the presence of the sovereign Lord God and His Lamb (21:22). When humanity willingly subjects itself in worship and acknowledges God as sovereign, He will enter into His reign (11:15; 15:3). A shout of victory will celebrate His sovereignty and the defeat of the enemies (19:6).

God's Justice and Sovereignty

The God of the Apocalypse can be discerned through its Christology. Christ reveals God. The exalted Lamb is enthroned in the middle of the throne. God's throne is the throne of Christ (5:6; 7:17). From Christ's exalted position, He acts as an instrument of God's sovereignty and justice.

He will open the seals to reveal what has been heretofore hidden. He reveals God's sovereignty and justice from the beginning of history to its end. From the foundation of the world, God has acted to bring His people into the kingdom (3:14; 22:13). The decisive point of Christ's power is in God's sacrifice. God's omnipotence is seen through Christ, the slain Lamb, who redeems the world. As Christ opens the seals, God's justice is accomplished and the world is brought under God's complete sovereignty.

The dragon. The dualism in John's theology of good and evil is not a decisive two category concept. God, the Creator, creates the universe, and it came into being through His will (4:11). The Genesis creation myth is brought forward into the Apocalypse to define the cosmos as being good. God's holiness, portrayed by John's liturgy, is just and true (15:4). God's character cannot function in totality where the Dragon is present. God, who is just and holy, takes just action through the slain Lamb in order to defeat the alien power of evil that has entered into the created order. The slain Lamb, with horns and eyes, now stands powerfully enthroned. God, who is sovereign and victorious, inaugurates the redemptive action necessary to restore the cosmic order. The slain Lamb's liberating power emanates from the cross. He is now worthy to open the seals which will bring God's corrupted creation under the complete sovereignty of God. The future holds a holy city in which nothing corrupt can enter (21:27).

John brings Satan from the Old Testament and gives him a unique character. He is cunningly shrewd and he is an able executive. His first attempt to gain power and a kingdom is to go straight to the opposition's source of power where he tries to kill it (12:4-5). He is foiled in attempting to devour his foes' seat of power; thus he seeks the aid of two helpers (13:1,11). The Dragon confers powers on his executive staff, and he proceeds

to get the strategy of his war room in operation (13:4,12). The demonic trinity designs a strategy called idolatry (13:6). They will implement this strategy through propaganda (13:5).

John focuses on idolatry as the precise method by which the corruption of the created order comes about. If humankind insists on finding security in worshipping that which is not of God, the created order will become askew, and the results will be a powerful demonic activity. The sin of idolatry lies at the root of evil.

John shows that evil through idolatry has a reinforcing capability. The woman, who sits upon the beast, is clothed in purple and scarlet. She wears expensive jewelry and drinks the cup of obscenities. She is drunk with the blood of God's people (17:4-6). Idolatry becomes entrenched into the warp and woof of society so that all of its functions undergird demonic activity.

Evil is also deceitful and it is powerfully delusive. That entity which appears to be grandeur and a magnificent display of splendor is not always good. The whole world goes after the beast in wondering admiration (13:4). He is able to deceive people with his lies (13:6). They are enthralled and fascinated with his charm and beguiling deceit. The second Beast is able to delude the people with his miracles (13:14).

The evil of idolatry is also devastating. It feeds on itself to build destructive structures, empires, and cities. Nations and empires that idolize false virtues have destruction embodied in their dehumanized ethos. The glamour and splendor of the structure are unsound because the structure is built on idolatry; hence it will come to ruin (17:17). The interactive relationships of these structures also become destructive and lead to ruin. The corporate sin of idolatry manifests itself in tension, strife, and victimization. The demonic claims ride roughshod over each other, and they

attempt to thrive by competition in institutional corporations. These demonic institutions are based on the chaos of idolatry. The beast on whom the woman is mounted, together with other power structures, strips the scarlet woman naked and leaves her desolate. They feed on her flesh and burn her into a heap of ashes (17:16). The people of God are asked to come out of the city; then they do not have to share in her ravaging forces (18:4).

The People of God

The Apocalypse points to three themes to which God's people are called. They are called to faith, witness, and the priesthood as they participate in God's plan of salvation for His creation.

Called to Participate in Faith

The church is called to participate by faith in the divine plan of God. The Lamb conquers because the Lord of lords has companions who are faithful (17:14). The victory of God has already been won. Now the church is called upon to participate by faith and unwavering trust and certainty that the benefits of Christ's victory are a fully assured present and future hope. The power of idolatry is conquered and won by those saints who endure while God's complete sovereignty is being established. The church is called to love, loyalty, service, and fortitude (2:19). Faith and endurance are the methods by which God's people will conquer so that the divine plan of God will be established (13:10). The church of Christ is to confront the powers of destruction by remaining loyal to God's purpose. This may require the saints to be loyal and endure to the point of martyrdom. The radical acceptance of God's mysteries in the midst of adversity calls for faithfulness and truthfulness (2:13). Even if there is no respite in the worship of the Beast on the contemporary scene, the church is called to affirm the will of God by

remaining faithful to Jesus (14:12). Loyalty will result in the completion of God's plan for the church (2:10).

Called to Participate by Witness

The pattern of witness is defined for the church. Christ is the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the earthly kings (1:5). Christ is God's Faithful Witness by His earthly life, death, and resurrection. It is by the sacrifice on the cross that Christ carries out God's plan. Just as Christ carried out His commission, the church is called to be the faithful witness to carry out God's plan (11:1). The Dragon, however, wages war on those who bear testimony to Jesus (12:17). The church is appointed to prophesy, and it is called to witness even if the Dragon responds with violence (11:3,7). This testimony may incur death and humiliation, but in the end God's witnesses are victorious (11:12). They conquer by the blood of the Lamb and the testimony they bring (12:11). The church is the witness in ongoing history so that the sovereignty of God becomes a reality in the present, and life finds meaning in the purpose declared by God.

Called for the Priesthood

Christ frees his people from their sins, and He makes the church into a royal house to serve as priests of God (1:6). Christ stands as High Priest among His church (1:3). The royal house comes from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation (5:9). The new priesthood is ceremoniously clean because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). They are first-fruits for God and His Lamb. They are a spotless offering without blemish for God (14:3-5). Their office is priestly because they present the testimony of Jesus to the world (11:4). The priests offer prayers to God so that the kingdom may come (8:5). The kings and priests will reign forever

and ever in the future holy city (22:3-5).

Summary

This chapter has categorized the theology of John under the headings of the Lamb, God, and the people of God. This chapter has answered the theological inquiry of the interpreter as questions are asked of these categories.

The next chapter will deal with the Apocalypse as a New Testament prophecy and revelation. John writes the Apocalypse through his prophetic vocation, and through this vocation he reveals the revelation of Jesus Christ. When viewed through these two aspects, interpretation can be enlightened.

CHAPTER 7

Hermeneutics for Theology

The previous chapter delineated the Apocalypse into categories in order to ascertain the theological truths that are presented in the Apocalypse. The categorized Biblical theology enables the exegete to answer the theological inquiry.

John's theology derives from his prophetic vocation through which he gives the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation is written to the seven churches in Asia as a prophetic consolation and exhortation which is addressed to the crisis of the day. The revelation of Jesus Christ is encoded into the apocalyptic genre. John's theology can be determined through the Apocalypse's categories of prophecy and revelation. The following will approach the Apocalypse as a New Testament prophecy and revelation. Hermeneutical axioms can then be derived for the minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

New Testament Prophecy

John opens the Apocalypse as bearing witness to the Word of God and the testimony of Christ (1:2). The unveiling is of God's redemptive act in Christ for the world's redemption. He is the Alpha and the Omega (1:8). Christology and eschatology are united. The redemptive act of God is not an addition to the expected future, but rather, it controls the understanding of the future. The expected future is quite different from that of the Old Testament and other apocalypses. The future is awaited through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. The concentration of this

action in Christ presents the now and not yet of the kingdom. The battle has been won, but the future requires that Christ open the seals of judgment so that the future can come.¹ The unveiling of the present and the future is made possible through Christ; the revelation is eschatological.

John differed from other apocalyptic writers because he starts from the standpoint of salvation history. It was characteristic of apocalyptists to revert to past history to prophesy the past as the final resolution of time. The resolution was to be in the immediate future. Apocalyptists had no faith in the present to project on to the future. They saw people suffering for their faith, and people could look for immediate divine intervention into their plight.² It was from this position that they foretold the future as breaking into the present.³

The prophets foretold the future on the basis of the present. They reviewed the policies of the present with keen observation, and then they indicated the unavoidable consequences. When sin was rampant, they would predict its results. Through all the doom and disaster, however, they saw hope in an era when evil will have destroyed itself.⁴

John, however, reveals the past, present, and future of history. The New Testament prophetic Epistle now can view all of history through the redemptive act of Christ. The battle had been won in heaven, but now it

¹ Beasley-Murray, 25-26.

² Harold Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic, 2nd ed. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), 36.

³ Rowley, 35.

⁴ Rowley, 35-36.

must be won on earth. The battle will be won on earth from the standpoint of God's act in history.

Eschatological Victory

The New Testament Apocalypse recapitulates no past history which will break into the immediate future. Nor does John project from the present into the future on the basis of the present. John does not need to resort to pseudonymity. He writes the New Testament Epistle as a prophetic revelation. The Apocalypse reveals God and His Lamb from the omnipotent position of who is, and was, and who is to come (1:5).

The revelation is historical from the fulcrum standpoint of the cross which projects its power from beginning to end. Divine provision is made for the redemption of the world through the slain Lamb from the beginning of history (13:8). John reveals God's purpose, and he shows that the slain Lamb has been there overarching all of history. John reflects New Testament theology because "Christian theology understands the historical event "Jesus Christ" as eschatological event, sees God acting definitively for the salvation of the world in the cross and resurrection of Jesus."⁵ It also holds "Christian existence in this world as existence in the dawning eschatological kingdom of God."⁶ Christian apocalyptic now speaks of the fulfillment of God's purpose in history, and this is John's prophetic revelation. The historical event as eschatological event is the power by which the victory of God is established in the present and will be brought into completion in the future (11:15).

Kingdom Present Reality

The Gospels repeatedly record Jesus' central theme of the kingdom of

⁵ Waiter Schmithals, The Apocalyptic Movement, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 158.

⁶ Schmithals, 158.

God. Jesus announces that He is the eschatological Prophet (Isa. 61:1ff; Luke 4:18ff). His message is that the kingdom is at hand; people are to repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15). He is sent to preach the good news of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43).

In the last part of Jesus' ministry, Jesus speaks of entering into the kingdom of God. During the first part of His ministry, He indicates that the kingdom is coming. The turning point of His sayings occurs between the transfiguration and the last journey into Jerusalem. His reference to God as Father and to Himself as the Son of Man also occurs during the second part of His ministry.⁷ Jesus' future reference and present reference to the kingdom are solved in "that Jesus held that the Kingdom of God had come in some real sense during his own ministry."⁸

In the New Testament, the kingdom of God is referred to in the present indicative form. The good news is that God has acted in present history, and thereby the kingdom of God becomes the central subject for the Gospel writers.⁹ Jesus ushers in the kingdom of God as a present reality through His ministry and person. The eschatological Prophet of the end time claims all future hope of the world in His own person. The future is present now in His person. The Messianic hope had been fulfilled, and the apocalyptic hope is being fulfilled, while God continues to act in history.

The Apocalypse reflects the Gospels. John's Apocalypse reflects the in breaking of God into history through His slain Lamb to usher in an age

⁷ Thomas W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1948), 129.

⁸ Manson, 129-130.

⁹ John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 197.

where God's people are constantly at the end of time, and yet they are looking for the eschaton. He brings salvation into history from beyond history. Humankind is in need of salvation, and it can only receive salvation historically. Humankind cannot bring salvation to the world because it is in need of salvation. Humankind does not have to be redeemed from history, but rather, humankind requires redemption from its sinful condition in history. This is the history which God enters through the slain Lamb. Through this action, God confronts the god of this world by revealing Himself in the historical place as redeemer. The dualism of this age and the next loses its determinism, and it becomes a dualism of resolution. The old aeon and the new aeon do not stand in opposition. They merely overlap in the middle of history. For those who give testimony to Christ, it signifies an end of aeon; and to the idolator, it signifies condemnation. The apocalyptic anticipation of the eschaton is transformed into the historical decision for the kingdom of God.¹⁰ The historical decision for the kingdom brings the holy city from the future into the present. The decision for the kingdom is the testimony of Jesus and the spirit that inspires the prophets (19:10).

Saints Have Prophetic Calling

The Christian calling is prophetic (11:3). The life, death, and resurrection of the slain Lamb are the purposeful acts of God in history by which creation finds its redemption. The powers of the dragon are defeated by God's plan. Through God's truthfulness and justice, the Lamb now exercises judgment so that the new aeon will come into fulfillment. The Lamb has already conquered, but now His priests have a prophetic witness

¹⁰ Schmithals, 160.

task to perform in order for the kingdom to become a reality. The church is to bear witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus (1:2). The eschatological Prophet of the end time had come in person as the Faithful Witness to be the Firstborn of the new aeon (1:5). The kingdom becomes a reality as the prophets witness to the life, death, and resurrection of the slain Lamb. They are inspired by the spirit to bring the secret purpose of God into fruition through their testimony (19:10). The demonic wanes through the judgment of Christ and the prophetic warfare of the saints. The sovereignty of God and the powers of the age to come are brought about by testimony (19:7-8).

As Christ unlocks the seals of judgment against evil, the saints are called to testimony and faith. These are the methods by which the future will come into the present. The saints arrive at victory only if they can wear white robes. They can come through the great ordeal only by faith in the purpose of God. The saints do not take up arms to aid Christ in victory, but rather, their testimony and faith are their weapons. John's theology gives evil the opportunity to repent. As humankind repents and gives allegiance to God, the kingdom comes, and the nonrepentant world faces destruction. God's salvation and purpose is at work in the world through the saints. The saints are required to adhere to testimony and faith to the point of martyrdom.

The Apocalypse is dualistic in its theology of good and evil. The dualism of this age and the next age is confronted by God and the saints in history. The next age is already here, but it requires the dualism of good and evil to be removed. In response to this, the testimony of God's saints will

have to develop an eschatological hope in harmony with New Testament prophecy.

In order to determine references to the future, definition becomes necessary as a way for identifying the future eschatological hope. The future hope can find meaning in "to extrapolate from the present into the future is eschatology, to interpolate from the future into the present is apocalyptic."¹¹ The present which expects to find hope based in the already existent would reinforce the already evil. John's vision into a society free of idolatry presents a concept of bringing the future into the present. The Christian hope would then place its confidence in apocalyptic as defined by the above.

Carl Braaten asserts that "the expression 'theology of hope' is commonly used carelessly to cover two quite different systems of thought."¹² The first is eschatology as present into the future extrapolation. This eschatology is described as evolutionary monism, and the word to describe this is development. Revolutionary dualism is the eschatological hope of the future as the future coming into the present. This is done by creative negation. The key descriptive word for this type of eschatology is liberation.¹³ One can also designate the present into the future by the Latin term futurum. This focuses on the future as an actualization of the potential within a given thing. The Latin term, adventus, denotes bringing the new

¹¹ Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations: More Recent Writings, trans. Kevin Smyth, 20 vols, (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 4: 337.

¹² Carl E. Braaten, Christ and Counter-Christ (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 9.

¹³ Braaten, 9.

into an entity where the new has never existed before.¹⁴ Braaten states, "Christian eschatology is not metaphysical finalism but apocalyptic adventism."¹⁵ John's theology of evil is not consistent with development because he points out that Babylon sees development as idolatry. Interpolation from the future into the present brings judgment for evolutionary monism and destroys the development of its idolatry.

John's apocalyptic relates to the negative principle in the form of Babylon, the scarlet woman, and the Dragon. God enters into history in order to negate the negative principle through judgment. This will create conflict, but through the conflict and the testimony of the saints, the adventus of the apocalyptic vision arrives into the present. It is the slain Lamb confronting by command those who have ears to hear with the purpose of God in history. The slain Lamb proclaims the adventus of the city of God through His judgment.

Hermeneutics for

Revelation as Prophecy

John writes a prophetic Book. Through his prophetic calling, John reveals the will of God for the church. The salvation history that has begun at the cross will be fulfilled. John can illuminate the immediate future because it is part of the complete plan and will of God. The Old Testament prophets emphasize hope, but now the New Testament prophet can emphasize the now and not yet because the future hope has already broken into history. The following are axioms for the Book of Revelation as informed by the prophetic aspect of his theology:

¹⁴ Braaten, 11.

¹⁵ Braaten, 11.

1. The decoded message of the Apocalypse is eschatological.
2. The decoded message of the Apocalypse is eschatological victory.
3. The decoded message of the Apocalypse is that the kingdom of God is a present reality.
4. The decoded message of the Apocalypse sees the saints as the eschatological hope of the future. They have a prophetic calling to testimony and faith.

Revelation of Jesus Christ

The revelation as prophecy reveals the purpose and will of God in history. New Testament prophetic revelation now stems from the Easter event. The kingdom of God comes with the person of Jesus. Its reality is possible through God's redemptive act in Christ. The coming of God's kingdom also relies on the testimony of the saints. The New Testament prophetic Apocalypse speaks to the purpose of God and its role in the coming of the kingdom. The prophecy deals with what will happen from the Easter event, and the revelation of Jesus Christ unveils the character and nature of God. The succeeding paragraphs will concern themselves with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Redemption of the World

John's theology establishes God as creator and redeemer. This is succinctly illustrated in his throne room scene of chapters 4-5. The vision in heaven shows God's plan and procedure of salvation for the creation. The Apocalypse unveils a redemptive God who redeems His world by being slain. The Old Testament Messianic hope as conveyed from the throne room scene reveals a slain Lamb as a powerful reality in the present and in the future. Through being slain, the Lamb gains a position of strength and victory. Through the victory gained by His act and His sovereignty, God will conquer

all chaos and corruption in His created order. The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ reveals God in Christ as the world's Redeemer. The present reality of the cross is at work in the created order through judgment. John's Apocalypse unveils God's redemptive plan as it begins victoriously at the cross. The victory of God in Christ secures the power by which the Lamb passes judgment on all that opposes His reign. The sentence of condemnation on evil will bring about the future city of God.

God as Creator

The Apocalypse reveals a sovereign God who creates the universe by His will (4:11). The created order was good. The evil that exists in the world is brought about by human sinfulness. God's holiness, truthfulness, and justice require Him to mete out the sentence of justice and truthfulness by destroying the powers of darkness (19:2). God does this through His powerful Lamb who exists from the very beginning. God's character and will are expressed by His sacrifice and the resulting justice to His created order. The slain Lamb enters into the human condition to reveal the will of God and His ongoing activity in restoring His created order.

Beginning and End of History

John brings the I am revelation of God to Moses and the people of Israel forward into the Apocalypse. God reveals Himself in His character and relationship by revealing His name. He is God who is active in history (Exod. 3:14). The Apocalypse unveils God as the Alpha and the Omega, who is, was, and is to come (1:8). The God of your Fathers and who is to be remembered now becomes the God of the future. The future comes to God's people through His activity in history. The kingdom of God enters into history through the redemptive work of the slain Lamb. The slain Lamb reveals the character of God who concerns Himself to send His Faithful Witness to free

His people from their sins with His life's blood (1:5-6). Christ reveals God as the Alpha and Omega who has been active in history and comes into history to bring the kingdom of God. Christ reveals the character and relationship of God in His person and ministry. Christ reveals that the activity of God comes to His people from the future. The Alpha and the Omega encompasses all of history, and He is active through all of history. The revelation of Christ shows this span of history. The future holds a holy city where He will guide His kings and priests to the fountains of the waters of life, and He will give freely to the thirsty (7:17; 21:2-8). The waters of life will replace the deep (21:1).

Future Comes Through

Divine Judgment

John relates primal history with the middle of history to the future of history by reference to the sea. He brings the creation myth into the Apocalypse, and he refers to the primeval sea as the place from which evil arises. God had created the world good (Gen. 1:31). The Spirit of God moves upon the waters, and He brings forth light which is good (Gen. 1:1-4). The creation myth brings light out of chaos. The Serpent enters into God's primordial light to deceive the created order (12:9; Gen. 3:1-6). Divine judgment is established after the fall because humankind knows both good and evil (Gen. 3:14-21).

Evil now exists in the world, and the adversary firmly entrenches his efforts against God's people (12:17; 13:1,11). God's people will, however, prevail by the sacrifice of the Lamb and their testimony to the Lamb (12:11). By this sacrifice, the Lamb now becomes worthy to break the seals that will put evil under judgment. The slain Lamb becomes the conquering Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes (5:6). Through His power, which he derives from

His sacrificial act, He will conquer the foe. As evil is removed the kingdom will come. God's justice and sovereignty will prevail, and God and His Christ will reign forever and ever (11:15). The chaos and darkness that entered God's good creation will be removed, and the primordial light will be restored (22:5; Gen. 1:1-3). The sea which is present in the throne room is no longer present in the city of God (21:1). The reservoir from which evil stems will no longer be a part of the kingdom. Through God's promise and fulfillment, paradise will be restored (Gen. 12:3; Matt. 1:17-18; Rev. 22:2-5).

The worthy Lamb now metes out judgment so that the blessings of the kingdom will come. The Apocalypse shows Christ as entering into an enslaved world that can only be set free by doing battle with the forces of evil. The invasion and battle will rage until all forces of evil have been annihilated. Annihilation of evil constitutes victory and salvation for the universe. God's justice and wrath must deal with the power of evil so that the reign of God can be established. The reign of God is established wherever His sovereignty is recognized and humanity worships only Him.

Hermeneutics for the Revelation

John's theology enables the church to view the whole of history. God in Christ reveals His purpose for the world. The following are hermeneutical axioms for the Book of Revelation which express the revelatory aspect of his theology:

1. The decoded message of the Apocalypse reveals God as a sovereign God who has acted to redeem His world.
2. The decoded message of the Apocalypse reveals God as creator who deals creatively with His world in order to redeem it rather than allowing the world to destroy itself.
3. The decoded message of the Apocalypse reveals the Redeemer who

reveals the character of God.

4. The decoded message of the Apocalypse reveals a sovereign God.

Summary

This chapter has been approached through John's prophetic vocation. Through this vocation, he writes a New Testament prophecy that gives the revelation of Jesus Christ. As a New Testament prophet, John differs from other apocalyptic writers, and he centers his writing around the eschatological event of Jesus Christ as it comes into past history. The Eschaton has broken into history and brings the reality of the kingdom into existence. The kingdom now requires that the priests of God enter into the struggle to make the kingdom a reality. The eschatological event assures the saints that the future is an assured hope.

This chapter has dealt with the revelation as prophecy. This reveals the purpose and will of God in history. God, as creator and redeemer, enters into the world to redeem His world. God is revealed as the omnipotent God who spans all of history and is active in all of history. As a just God, His activity in history requires Him to put evil under judgment so that salvation can come.

When the Book of Revelation is approached from its revelatory and prophetic standpoint, it allows for more distinct hermeneutics to be established. This chapter has devised eight hermeneutical axioms for the interpreter.

The next chapter will give a theological interpretation of the Book of Revelation based on the foregoing research.

CHAPTER 8

Interpretive Theological Summation

John's priestly message is significant for our time. The technological world has severed itself from hope as it struggles to find answers to its predicament. It has developed a negative ambivalence which on the one hand demands human rights and liberation and on the other hand resigns itself to death and Hades. The cry of "how long," however, takes on different mode in the Apocalypse. Grace comes to His people from Him who was, is, and is to come. The future hope is not an empty void which is consumed by the demonic and the destructive, but rather, the future is in the present. The world is called to turn to see whose voice it is that is speaking to me (1:12). The voice comes from the Alpha and the Omega who has fulfilled God's purpose and embraces the aggregate of past, present, and future. The Faithful Witness has given testimony to God who has come to humankind in the past and comes to God's people from the future. Death and chaos has lost its power because I was dead, and now I am alive forevermore (1:18). Hope comes to God's people from the future because God has established His reign in the present. The revolutionary message for contemporary society is that the purpose of God is established.

The following is a summation statement based on the hermeneutics that were determined from the theology of the Apocalypse. This chapter will repeat the foregoing material as it applies to the contemporary world today.

The Purpose of God

Christ has confirmed the saving purpose of God. The Logos had acted

in His person and ministry to bring testimony to God's covenant which declares a new order. The sovereign edict has invaded history to be established as the divine power. The purpose of God has come into the mist of every tribe, language, and nation where it manifests its creative and redemptive work. The new redeemed humanity is appointed royalty to serve as God's priests, and they shall reign on earth. The triumphant reign comes through the salvation that only the redemptive reign of God can establish.

Salvation

Salvation belongs to God and the Lamb. The triumphant church can stand before the throne of God as a delivered people who have triumphed through the victory of God. The blessings of the white robe are God's achievement which the people of every tribe, language, and nation can acknowledge or reject. Victory and salvation belong to those who wash their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. The established, present victory of the washed robe empowers the wearer to overcome the powers of the great ordeal.

Eschatological Victory

The Male Child is now seated on the throne from which His rule extends over all the kings of the earth and all nations. The Shepherd, the Lamb, and the King alludes to His composite divine status from which He now rules with the rod of iron. His enthronement is the hour of victory for our God, and it is the hour of His sovereignty and power. The control of world history is and will be in the hands of the redemptive rule of God. The enthronement is made possible by the historical Easter event. God has acted in history, and that decisive act will interpret itself as victory in all future history in which the nations will rage. Humankind's liberation will take place between the established concrete act of God's salvation and the concrete establishment of His rule.

Kingdom Present Reality

The eschatological Prophet of the end time has entered into the historical place to reveal the secret purpose of God. The Lamb bears the marks of slaughter, and He is found worthy. Victory for the kingdom comes through the creative and judgmental work of God. The divine intervention gives birth to a new nation, and the repercussions of the divine act are felt in the promise that there will be no more delay. The seals, trumpets, and bowls confront an idolatrous humankind with its depraved sinfulness.

Humankind is in need of salvation. The present reality of the kingdom has come to humankind from outside its sphere of accomplishment. God has penetrated the idolatrous demonic powers that have infested the human condition to bring the dawn of salvation to the created order. The created order is invited to respond to the summons of God's sovereignty. The eschaton is found in the person of Christ, and humankind's salvation comes from beyond history into history through God's grace. Creation no longer needs to hope for salvation. The concrete reality of salvation has dawned, and the resulting kingdom emerges out of its power.

The Redeemer had confronted the god of this world. In that confrontation, the Accuser and Deceiver of humankind has been overthrown. The redeemed humankind has conquered by the sacrifice of the Lamb. The created order, however, is subject to the Accuser's and Deceiver's violence. His fury and wrath is great knowing that he has only a short time to victimize the old heaven and the old earth.

Saints Have Prophetic Calling

The purpose of God will come into fulfillment through the calling of the saints. At the seventh trumpet, the hidden purpose of God will have been fulfilled as He promised to His servants the prophets. The idolatrous earth

dwellers are confronted by the consequences of their own sin, the unfurling of the Lamb's scroll, and the prophetic voice of witness. The prophetic voice eats its scroll, and it is given the divine commission to utter prophecies over peoples, languages, nations, and many kings (10:11). The prophet stands on the cutting edge of each moment of crucial history not to predict on the basis of the present, but to prophesy the testimony of Jesus. The prophet, as king and priest, now reigns on earth, and the priestly prophecy is the divine Word and will of God. The Biblical witness pours fire from the mouth.

The Biblical Witness

The Biblical witness gives testimony to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The apocalyptic hope of the created order finds its salvation in the redemptive power of Christ. The demonic distortion of the corrupted cosmos is confronted in the present by the prophetic whole counsel of God. The Adventus has come from outside the sphere of human capacity to bring empowerment into human existence. The empowered, new covenant's, collective Elijah brings the advent of the new aeon into direct confrontation with the opposing force of Sodom and Egypt. It is here that the preaching of the Gospel proclaims victory through its transforming power.

Transforming Power

The bottomless pit of destruction must be defeated through the prophetic voice of human agents. They, as Christ, receive a scroll, but the human is the recipient of God's saving grace. God's saving purpose was established through the Faithful Witness, and because of this He is found worthy to open the seals against the demonic forces. The prophetic voice gives testimony to that saving purpose so that the kingdom can come into a world which worships the king of the abyss. The future hope of humankind is now assured through God's intervention into the human predicament. God has

assured the future through the past liberating action of Christ. The transforming power of the present arrives from the future as the prophetic voice gives testimony to the Adventus who overarches all of history. The future apocalyptic reality is interpolated into the present by the prophetic voice so that the now and not yet of the kingdom is a continuous transforming creativity.

Failure as Witness

John wrote to a beleaguered church in a time of great quandry and trial. His objective, as a prophet to the people of God, was to give counsel and warnings so that the will of God would be understood during the immediate crisis. John warns that the witness is vulnerable to deceit, and the witness must constantly discern that which might be from Satan's domain. The temptations to hold to the teachings of Balaam and to tolerate the woman Jezebel are betrayals that can enter into the committed community of testimony. The church is called to discernment of the deceptions in the immediate present so that its transforming creativity of destiny is founded on the Advent.

The prophetic witness is dressed in sackcloth. In the constant discernment of the present deceptions, the prophetic witness is called to repent from that which is idolatrous. The Biblical witness is to wake and put some strength into what is left and remember the teaching that was received, observe it, and repent (3:2-3).

Witness Called to Faith

and Suffering

The Biblical witness is called to faith, toil, suffering, and endurance. The present is the time of conflict between the powers of light and darkness. The rule of God is in conflict with the rule of Satan. The prophetic vocation

relies on the power of faith in God's victory that has been won. Endurance during the conflict is the powerful weapon of the saint which brings the apocalyptic adventism into powerful reality. The purpose of God that was achieved by the Lamb finds fulfillment in the tenacity and fortitude of the evangelized saints who with no more delay become instruments of the apocalyptic hope. The Biblical witness must be prepared to face the strong opposition of the tyrannical power which thirsts for the death of the witness.

John's prophetic warning to the church to keep faith in the purpose of God has made its inroads into the struggle ladden world. In today's world, people can still see the Beasts' ideologies in the form of corrupt power, barbaric institutions, and intimidating coercion. The apocalyptic adventism, however, has prevailed because the victory has been won. Today, if Nero were to return to his gardens where he tortured the Christians, he would find an edifice built to the glory of God. The church is named after Peter who was Nero's victim. The Roman empire fell in the fifth century, but the Christian empire remained.¹

Political Evangelization

The emperor worship to which John has directed his attention is as great a concern for the Christian today as it was then. It is even more so for the American who is easily duped into the delusion that the mythological American dream is the ultimate Utopia. John insists that God rules in His sovereignty, and the ultimate Utopia is the city of God where now at last God is dwelling among humankind. John has confronted the question of the relationship of the church and state. William Stringfellow pointed out that

¹ T. F. Glasson, The Revelation of John, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965), 15.

"Americans fail to comprehend Revelation as an ethical literature concerning the character and timeliness of God's judgment, not only of persons, but over nations and, in truth, over all principalities and powers."² Christ is the first-born from the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. The commander-in-chief of the army of death and Hades is the Deceiver and a blasphemer. He has given the sea Beast or the political Beast the same power and authority to make war on God's people. The whole world is deceived into worship and wondering adulation; who is like the Beast and who can fight against it (13:4)? Those who have ears to hear are asked to hear what the Spirit says. Corrupt nations, powers, and principalities are governed by the power of death and Hades.

Discernment of the Sea Beast

The Biblical witness is not only required to discern the apostasy within the church, but the witness is also required to discern the idolatry of Babylon. The battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan will rage until the rule of God is established. John takes off the mask on the face of the enemy, and he names his various abilities. By categorizing the opposition, naming his abilities, and divulging his method of operation, the Biblical witness can be aware of the deceptive powers of the Dragon and his alter egos.

Idolatry and the demonism of emperor worship is not the anti-Christian force of the first century, but is alive and well in our time. The discerning witness understands that God's sovereignty is established, and Christianity is not a pious ethical movement which must be kept separate from "government." The American mindset has created a watered down Christ who blends in with

² William Stringfellow, An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land, 3rd ed. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979), 27.

the subjective mood and outward ideals of freedom. John explicitly informs his readers that the exalted Christ acts as judge, and all nations shall come and worship in His presence, for His just dealings stand revealed (15:4). The American "God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."³ This is the nation's greatest deception that is perpetrated by the king of the abyss. Thy kingdom come means total subjection to the will of God, and that includes the political realm. Kingdom is a political statement, and the kingdom that is of this world is that which gives its allegiance to the god of this world. Only when the god of this world is defeated through the judgment of the cross, the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of God and His Lamb.

Mission to Earth Dwellers

The redemptive purpose of God is brought into fulfillment through Christ. Evil has been overthrown, but now the saints must eat their scroll so that its contents not only become the very essence of their being, but also are reproduced in word and deed. They are commissioned to prophesy the new covenant. They are commissioned as a royal house to serve as priests; and they shall reign upon earth (5:10). The completion of God's purpose now depends on the prophetic assimilation of the testimony and its prophetic surge into the world.

The prophetic role of the witness requires the prophet to swallow the bitter with the sweet. The redemptive purpose of God is difficult for both the prophet and the earth dwellers. The earth dwellers are confronted with the testimony of Jesus, and this causes the Biblical witness to be embroiled in

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 193.

opposition. Satan and those who worship him wage war on God's prophets because their testimony is a torment to the whole earth.

The prophetic witness reveals the kingdom of God by revealing the will of God. Through the functions of priest and king, the prophetic witness is the agent in the cosmos by which the world becomes reconciled to the Creator and Redeemer. As the rule of God finds expression on earth, the kingdom of God comes. When God's sovereignty is established, humankind will be truly liberated from worshipping the monster from the abyss.

The role of the prophet is to call the earth dwellers to repentance. The world is called to repent and believe in the Gospel. The world is given every opportunity to repent from idolatry. The evangelization of the earth dwellers creates the metanoia necessary for the changed society in which the will of God becomes the established rule. John portrays the repentance of the earth dwellers as an extreme challenge to the prophetic vocation because the earth dwellers are rebellious and resistant. Even with the prophetic voice, the negative consequences of their own idolatry, and the judgment of the Lamb, they do not abjure their Gods nor cease to worship devils, nor repent from their murders, sorceries, fornication, and robberies (9:20).

The Kingdom of God

The main theme of John's theological message is that God has revealed through Christ His purpose for creation. God has entered into the fallen human condition in order to redeem and restore His creation. The Apocalypse reveals a concerned God who has acted in history and will continue to do so. The Eschaton has broken into history in the past to confront the basic problem that separates humankind from its creator. God's care for His creation is manifested in the Christmas event, and the redemptive act of the Easter event will bring about the cosmic restoration. The adventus of a new age is now

possible because the Lamb is worthy and has ransomed humankind for God. The new Israel is now released from its bondage of sin. It is now led out of captivity under a new covenant to a new promised land. The historical event is the apocalyptic adventus by which the purpose of God will come into fruition.

Alpha and Omega

The God who is active in history is the Alpha and the Omega, the One who is, was, and is to come. The Alpha and the Omega is the sovereignty of all history. He comes to His people from the past, present, and future. Because God is active in history and has decisively acted for the redemption of humankind in past history, the future history will be an assured victory. The victory has been established for the future so that the future can now come into the present. The God who extends over all of history assures the apocalyptic hope as the Adventus creatively negates the powers of darkness. The historical acts of God bring the eschatological into the present as the kingdom of God.

God's Judgment

God's kingdom comes through divine judgment. The Lamb is found worthy to open the seals of judgment. As divine judgments are meted out to a sinful humankind, their idolatry is brought into conscious awareness. The human defenses prove themselves difficult because humankind's idolatry refuses to acknowledge God as creator and redeemer. Humankind creates and fashions its idols with its own hands, and it worships the idols with zest and zeal. The demonic consequences of the idolatry create corrupt societies and power structures with the resulting evils and injustice. The evils and injustice become self-propagating and reinforce themselves. John shows that the divine judgments are limited so that humankind does have the opportunity to repent

from its evil ways. As humankind repents, evil is overcome, and the worship of God is established in its place. Citizens of the kingdom of God are liberated from their idolatry.

Faithful Witness

The kingdom will come through the voices of the faithful witnesses. The faithful witnesses are made into a royal house, to serve our God as priests; and they shall reign on earth (5:10). Humankind is redeemed to become a kingdom for God. As priests and kings of the royal house, the will of God will be the rule. The kingly and priestly function of God's people in the present is to establish that rule. As God's rule is established, Satan's rule wains. The kingdom of God is the reign of God.

The future apocalyptic hope has been established through God's intervention in history. The saints now can bring that future hope into the present by creatively negating the evil powers that exist in the world. The revolutionary dualism exercised by the saints brings the adventus of the future into the present. The revolutionary message for contemporary society is that the purpose of God is established.

Summary

This chapter has spoken to the contemporary situation through the Apocalypse. The research of the previous chapters which was based on the theology and the literary historical enables the interpreter to apply the Book of Revelation to the contemporary situation. The eschatological event has come into history in the past so that the future is now an assured hope. The eschatological victory is assured as God's saints are called to endurance and testimony in order to bring about the kingdom.

The next chapter will also undertake practical application. The prophetic call to testimony can now be made applicable through the art of

preaching. The next chapter will show the preaching value of the Book of Revelation. Through the sermon and worship event, the theology, liturgy, and imagery of the Apocalypse can reveal the New Testament good news.

CHAPTER 9

Preaching

The timeless message of John's Apocalypse is part of the good news of the Gospel proclamation. The main themes of the Apocalypse have been decoded. This has been done through the two disciplines of theology and hermeneutics. These two disciplines inform the discipline of preaching. The kerygma of the Apocalypse can now be applied to the life of the church today.

The Apostle Paul informs the ministry that they are to think of themselves as servants and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). The discipline of preaching requires a sacred stewardship. The stewardship of God's mysteries refers to the dispensing "of the secret knowledge of God's purpose disclosed in the Gospel."¹ John's Apocalypse reveals the secret purpose of God from beginning to end. The steward of the mysteries of God has a rich source for preaching themes in the Book of Revelation. This chapter will deal with the practical application of John's message to the preaching event and liturgy.

Perspectives of Preaching

The following are several perspectives of the preaching value in the Book of Revelation. A text, title, and purpose will be selected for each approach to serve as a guideline for the exegete.

¹ C. K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 100.

1. The minister can preach as if the pastor were John addressing the first congregation.

Text: Rev. 4; 5.

Title: "We Shall Reign on Earth."

Purpose: To instill hope and faith into the congregation through the throne room vision.

2. The minister can find the connection between the message of John and our situation today.

Text: Rev. 11:3-6.

Title: "Christian Witness."

Purpose: To remind the congregation of its vocation and its role in the world.

3. The minister can preach that we are in the kingdom or the not yet of the kingdom.

Text: Rev. 21:1-3.

Title: "Behold, the Dwelling of God Is with Men."

Purpose: To relate the presence of God and the kingdom.

4. The minister can preach the ethics of the Book which are applicable today.

Rev. 12:10-12; 13:10.

Title: "We Are Called to Nonviolence and the Two-edged Sword."

Purpose: To instill the Christian understanding of nonviolence and its weapon of defense.

5. The minister can use the same format that John used in writing to the churches.

Text: Rev. 2:1-7.

Title: "You Have Left Your Love."

Purpose: To instill into members of the congregation the need to change their unloving ways.

6. The minister can use the powerful imagery from the Apocalypse to address the dark side of today's predicaments.

Text: Rev. 6:1-8.

Title: "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

Purpose: To show the congregation the impact of evil in the world today.

7. The minister can preach John's message by using the Old or New Testament.

Text: Ps. 99:1-5; 115:3-8.

Title: "The Lord Reigns; Let the People Tremble."

Purpose: To inform the congregation about the folly of idolatry.

Sermon

The following is a sermon written to place the Eucharist as a statement of the Book of Revelation's theology. Nowhere does the kingdom of God stand so symbolically vivid as it does in the Eucharist. The creative act of God in concrete salvation history has made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth. Appropriate texts have been chosen from the Old and New Testament to reflect God's intervention in history. Salvation that is foreshadowed in the Old Testament culminates in the focal Easter event to bring the future adventus into the present.

The New Creation

Purpose: To place the Eucharist into the Apocalypse's theological perspective of the kingdom.

Text: Rev. 2:17; 5:10; Exod. 16:1-5; 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

I. Introduction

A. Manna. Can you imagine a free grocery store in the desert? No, of course not, it seems like a very remote possibility; but that is what God did for the children of Israel. The Book of Exodus tells us that they murmured against Moses and Aaron. They complained that they didn't have enough to eat. They wished that they would have stayed in their circumstances of slavery rather than starve to death in the Wilderness of Sin. God, however, didn't let them starve. He said, "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you." In the morning, they found manna on the ground. Moses then informed the community, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat."

Today, we may not have our manna fall from heaven, but God has provided us with a different type of manna. In fact, this manna cannot be purchased at any store for any price. It, however, comes from heaven, and it is free. When Jesus was asked to provide manna from heaven just as Moses did, He said that He was the true bread from heaven. He is the Bread of Life. Our sustenance comes from Him. Those who come to Him will never hunger or thirst. God has sent us the Manna from heaven who has ransomed a community of people for Him. God has provided Manna for our need and sustenance.

II. Body

A. New Community. The incarnation as the Bread of Life was God's plan to bring about a new community. This new community is special because it is a redeemed community. Jesus took on flesh and came into our human condition in order to become the slain Lamb for our sins. John tells us that Christ loves us; and He has freed us from our sins with His life's blood, who made of us a royal house, to serve as priests of His God and Father. God

acted out of love to send us Manna from heaven in order to redeem us and make us a special people. He has given us the Bread of Life from heaven to cleanse us from our sins so that we can have a special relationship with God. It is out of this restored relationship that we come into our special calling in this new community. John has told us that this new community is a royal house that serves as priesthood for God.

1. **To serve as kings.** Now that God's people have a special relationship with Him, they are called to a royal office. The people of God are a royal house. The Manna from heaven came to us to give us life and to become the first citizen of God's new kingdom. Christ now reigns as head of the kingdom as King of kings and Lord of lords. This new kingdom that God has established is different from a kingdom of the world because Christ shares with His subjects His kingly office. Because of that difference, the kingdom of God is strange and foreign to those outside the kingdom of God. Christians are called out of the world into the kingdom of God to reign in the kingdom. It is through those Christians who have been called out of the world into God's special community that Christ, as ruler, functions in the world. The church, as the community of the faithful, represents Christ. As His representatives, the called people exercise His rules in the world. As the redeemed people of God, the church is the salt and the light of the earth. They proclaim the essence of God and His will. As His will and rule is exercised on earth, His community grows and reflects His rule.

2. **The priestly office.** The new kingdom is called and separated into a nation that is in service to God. This is the priestly office. The priestly office carries out the rule of God on earth. The priestly office is the instrument by which the rule of God comes on earth. The priestly office is the way God's kingdom comes on earth. The Christian is called to

the priestly function to bring God's will into a world which for the most part still expresses conflict, discord, and corruption. The priestly office is called to show the world the truth about God and His love for the world.

God loved His world so much that He sent His Manna from heaven to become a sacrificial Lamb in order to redeem a community. The new kingdom would not be possible if God had not loved His creation so that He would restore it. The kingdom would not be possible if the Bread of Life had not come down from heaven to show us what God expected of us. The sacrificial Lamb has shown us what God is and what God has done for His people. The sacrificial Lamb has shown us the extent of God's love that has been given to an unworthy humankind. But, it is this love that the redeemed priesthood can now extend into a broken world to bring the kingdom of God into fruition.

B. The Kingdom of God. The Manna from heaven brought the kingdom of God through His sacrifice and ministry. A kingdom requires people. God has chosen to make His subjects a royal people who serve as priests. Christ has made them into a royal house to serve as priests. John tells us they shall reign on earth. As God's people exercise their functions of the royal priesthood, the promise of God's full reign comes into fulfillment. As God's reign is established on earth, the powers of darkness vanish. The church is the beacon of light into the world by which the darkness of a corrupt world vanishes into oblivion. The work of the priesthood is like creating something new. It is like a painter, or an architect, or someone who bakes a cake. The artist sees the finished product in the mind's eye and works from beginnings with tools and guidelines to create a finished product.

1. **Illustration.** In order to build a house, one has to make a blueprint. The blueprint is a concrete plan of what the perfect and glorious end results will be. It is the picture of what has been conceived in the

mind's eye as the finished product. Then work to create the house can commence. The task of putting the house together is a big project which takes time and effort. It also takes rules by which it can come about. That is, one cannot apply just any rules or the structure will collapse. So it is with the kingdom of God. Jesus, the Manna from heaven, has entered into our world to show us what the kingdom of God is like through His work on the cross and in His ministry. He has given us the blueprint and has shown us the rules by which the kingdom of God can be constructed. Just as the house that is being built, didn't come into being just by announcing the fact; likewise, the kingdom of God requires the builders to bring about the final product. Just as the house requires rules to bring the structure into completion; likewise, the kingdom of God requires that the will of God be the rule by which it is built. When the rule of God is effectively fulfilled on earth, then the kingdom will be brought into completion.

As kings, the priesthood reigns by implementing God's rule into the world. As priests, they build and construct the various rooms of God's kingdom to His specifications. The structure is sure and it is sound because it will not fail. We know it will not fail because it is based on the love that God first showed to His people by sending the Manna from heaven to show us how to construct the new building or creation.

2. **Illustration.** Jesus gave us many parables about the kingdom so that we can understand how it comes. He said that was like a mustard seed which was sown. This small little seed can grow and develop to the point where birds nest in it. The kingdom started small. It started with the twelve disciples and now our task as kings and priests is to creatively implement God's rule on earth so that the kingdom fills the whole earth, and then we shall reign on earth with our Manna from heaven who came from God

to redeem us so that we could live with Him one day in fullness.

III. Conclusion

A. Manna from Heaven in Remembrance. Until that day when we drink of the fruit of the vine and feast with our Lord in the kingdom, we partake of the bread of life and the fruit of the vine in remembrance of that love that God bestowed on us. We also remember the future, so that we constantly have the future blueprint of the kingdom in mind. This will enable us to creatively build the kingdom. We celebrate the future where our Lord will return in glory to reign with us as kings and priests in the kingdom. The new creation has come, but it is not entirely here. We celebrate its presence now. We celebrate by partaking of these symbols so that we are reminded to be the living symbols of God's grace to a fearful world in need of God's grace. Let us partake of the bread and wine that the Bread of Life instructed us to take until He returns to drink with us anew in the kingdom of God. There the people of God will never hunger and will never thirst because God will dwell in the midst of His people.

Liturgical Seasons

The Book of Revelation provides many themes for the church year. The liturgical calendar from Advent through Kingdomtide can find appropriate themes and topics in the Apocalypse.

Themes for Church Year

The revelation of God and humankind's response to that grace are expressed in a variety of imageries appropriate for the Christian year. The following are some examples for each season:

Advent:

1:3	The Hour of Fulfillment
3:20	The Knock on the Door

4:8 Who Was, Is, and Is to Come
 5:6-14 The New Song
 6:9-16 How Long, The Cry of My People

Christmastide:

1:9-20 The Son of Man
 1:4-8 Birth of a Nation
 12:1-6 He Was Destined to Rule
 19:11-20 King of Kings and Lord of Lords
 11:15-18 He Shall Reign Forever and Ever

Epiphany:

1:6 To Him Be Glory and Dominion
 5:1-14 He Is Worthy to Open the Seals
 6:12-17 The Vengeance of the Lamb
 19:2 True and Just Are His Judgments
 18:4-8 The World Is Doomed

Lent:

7:9 The Vast Throng
 7:13-17 Robed in White
 14:1-5 First Fruits for God and the Lamb
 1:9 The Suffering and Endurance Which Is Ours
 6:11 In Christ's Service

Easter:

1:9-20 The Risen Christ
 21:7-8 The Spring of Life
 6:17 Who Will Be Able to Stand
 1:5-6 Firstborn from the Dead
 11:19 The Ark of the Covenant

Pentecost:

19:18 The Bride of Christ
 21:1-6 The New Jerusalem
 3:1 The Seven Spirits of God
 21:22-27 City of Light
 2:10-11 Hear What the Spirit Says

Kingdomtide:

5:9-10 A Royal House to Serve as Priests
 8:1-5 The Prayers of God's People
 10:1-11 Take and Eat the Scroll
 11:1-14 They Will Wage War
 12:7-12 They Have Conquered by Sacrifice and Testimony

The Church Year

The preaching task of presenting the Word of God finds an abundant and rich source for the church year in the Book of Revelation. It enables the exegete to speak to the calendar year through New Testament theology and vivid imagery. The following will address each season of the year through the Apocalypse:

Advent. The Sundays of Advent prepare the people of God for the incarnational event. It is the season of shadows, darkness, threat, and fear as a quietness overcomes the people in their anticipation of God entering into history. The Advent is the focal point in history where all of creation erupt into the new creation. The people are waiting in fascination for the coming of the Apocalyptic Messiah who will overturn the present and establish the kingdom. The deliverer will come into the midst of bondage, and He will lead His people through the wilderness to the promised land.

Here the role of the pastor will be against present cultural trend. While the people of the earth are singing "Jingle Bells" and decking the halls, the people of God are awaiting the arrival of the Adventus.

Christmastide. On Christmas, the Adventus breaks into history. He is the Rider on the white horse. He is the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. In His right hand He holds seven stars, and out of His mouth comes a two-edged sword. The apocalyptic imagery which stands in startling contrast to the babe in swaddling clothes portrays the glorified Christ. The Adventus is now present with His people, and the old order is being and will be transformed. The cry of how long is answered. God has come into history to bring the new creation. God has given humanity a gift of love which will overturn the present order through creative negation.

Epiphany. In the Epiphany season, the world wide manifestation of

Christ is observed. The task of Christians now is to bring the Adventus into the world that is groaning to be restored. The Dragon and the Sea Beast will now be creatively negated through the mission of the saints. The prophetic voice is the eschatological hope of the future as the future is brought into the present. The earth dwellers and the kings of the earth are in need of salvation. The prophetic voice calls an unrepentent world to repentance so that it can be liberated from its idolatry. As the earth dwellers repent and give their worship to God, the kingdom comes into the present.

Lent. During the Lenten season, the church can reflect on its faith and come to strengthen it. Just as the Faithful Witness was faithful unto death; likewise, the church is called to suffering, endurance, and loyalty. The creative negation of evil and the salvation of the cosmos comes about as the Biblical witness is faithful and endures the onslaught of the opposition's tyrannical, deceitful almightiness. The coming Easter event is the day of victory over the forces of evil in all future time. The power of that event becomes concrete as the saints endure and have faith. The church can concentrate on its faith and endurance, and it can repent from its own idolatries.

Easter. Easter is God's act which has changed the course of world history. The power of Satan is now overcome. The Accuser and Deceiver of the world has been overthrown. Christ now holds the keys to death and Hades. Now the Judge of the world can open the seals to the scroll so that kingdom can come. Christ has become the firstborn of the new kingdom so that He is now ruler over the kings of the earth. Through His death and resurrection, He frees us from our sins with His life's blood, and He makes us into a royal house to serve as priests of His God. Christ establishes a holy nation who under a new covenant and new exodus will implement a new king-

dom of God. The apocalyptic Prophet of the end time has inaugurated the future which can now be brought into the present through creative negation.

Pentecost. Pentecost is the birthday of the bride of Christ. It is the day when the New Jerusalem was born. The future is now established by the Easter event. The awesome power of the Easter event has established the reconciliation of the cosmos so that the New Jerusalem could be born and come into fruition. The dwelling of God has come among men. The future city, in the form of a cube, awaits as humankind repents from idolatry. Then salvation will have come to the cosmos. Then the Lord our God, sovereign overall, will have entered into His reign. The future comes into the present as the kingdom of God because God entered into the world through the Adventus to give birth to a nation of pilgrims.

Kingdomtide. Kingdomtide or ordinary time is the time in which the church is making the New Jerusalem a reality. The new priests and kings of the new nation creatively negate the negative powers of the demonic through toil, endurance, faith, and hope. The apocalyptic hope becomes reality by creative negation through the prophetic voice of the saints. The future is brought into the present by deeming the New Jerusalem a present reality. The peculiar people of God know that God is dwelling among humankind, and they act in accordance with that knowledge. As they act in harmony with that knowledge, the kingdom comes among humankind. As signs and symbols of God's redemptive purpose, they are the living symbols of the New Jerusalem.

Symbols

Most of the psyche functions on the unconscious level. Preaching will have to recognize that motivation and wholeness of society can be brought about by appealing to the collective unconscious as well as the rational.

Rather than addressing the saints with imagination and symbol, the church has conformed to the technological rational mind of the empirical scientific culture.

The collective unconscious of humankind is the part of psyche in which the archetypical images or primordial images are deeply rooted. This psychic system is universal and identical in all persons. This phenomenon "does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents."² Almost all the symbols in the Apocalypse comply and have a strong relationship with the Jungian archetypal system.³

The function of the symbol is to serve as an integrating mechanism to close the gap between the conscious and the unconscious. When the gap between the conscious and unconscious is widened, neuroses increases.⁴ This is also true for a collective body of persons. Carl Jung states, "Nations in a collective condition of misery behave like neurotic or even psychotic individuals. First they get disassociated or disintegrated, then they pass into a state of confusion and disorientation."⁵ The confusion does not touch the unconscious, but as it becomes activated, it can be discerned through corpo-

² Carl Gustav Jung, Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series, vol. 9 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), 42.

³ Guilford Dudley, The Recovery of Myth (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 38.

⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, Symbols of Transformation, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series, vol. 5 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 442.

⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, The Symbolic Life, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series, vol. 18 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), 577.

rate projection.⁶ Projection is an unconscious intent, and it can be negated by awareness.⁷

Metaphor, imagination, and the symbolic archetypes are ways for the human psyche to orient itself to the unknown. Symbol orders experience and reality because once it is brought into consciousness; it requires interpretation; and this brings the reality of any dissonance into proper focus. This phenomenon has been ignored, and "churches have repudiated the great mythic images of the Bible. In doing so, they are forfeiting the chance to bring to culture a word of judgment and healing."⁸

The repression of conscious confrontation with evil by today's society is seen in its projected manifestation. Where God exists, one must deal with the devil. There is a distinction between good and evil. There is not just good and an illusion of evil. John's Apocalypse confronts this issue and names it in symbolic apocalyptic style. His variety of kaleidoscopic images of evil gives ample metaphor for integrating toward wholeness.

John captures the Gospel message in a symbolic form which he borrows from the timeless archetypal collective unconscious which has manifested itself in literature throughout history. John's New Testament Epistle gives ample symbols for the minister of the Gospel to speak to contemporary needs.

The images of the Apocalypse are immensely intense. Through their power, they are able to carry their own message. Just as these archetypal universal symbols have spoken in mythology and literature throughout history; likewise, the Apocalypse contains the universal language. The function of the

⁶ Jung, Symbolic, 577.

⁷ Jung, Symbolic, 137.

⁸ Dudley, 30.

imagery is to orient individuals and collective individuals to reality. The author of the Apocalypse assigns the images to their proper theological function. It is the responsibility of the art of preaching to use the images in their proper theological meaning. Then their value in ordering reality will reflect the Christian kerygma. The individual or collective body of individuals will order experience based upon the Gospel message. The images of the Apocalypse do not have to be demythologized in the pulpit or in liturgy. Rather than finding it necessary to explain them, it is in keeping with the wholesome balance of the unconscious to let the image perform its own function. They are the symbols of order for the universe, and John applies them to theological truth.

Just as the Apocalypse has had its influence on creativity throughout history, the preaching ministry can utilize the creativity of John. The art of preaching can be enhanced by his work. The powerful imagery of the New Testament Apocalypse conveys theological truth for transformation. The following are images from the Apocalypse that have been chosen at random:

Images:

- 1:5 The Kings of the Earth
- 1:6 He Is Coming in the Clouds
- 4:3 There in Heaven Stood a Throne
- 5:5 The Lion from the Tribe of Judah
- 5:10 A Royal House
- 6:1 The Lamb Broke the Seals
- 6:10 Avenge Our Blood
- 7:4 Tribes of Israel
- 7:9 Robed in White
- 8:1 The Golden Censer
- 8:5 Altar Fire
- 9:18 Fire, Smoke, and Sulphur
- 9:20 Idols Made from Gold
- 10:1 Face Shown as the Sun
- 10:6 Who Created Heaven, Earth, and the Sea
- 11:5 Fire Pours from Their Mouths
- 11:19 Lightning, Thunder, and Earthquake

12:1 A Woman Robed with the Sun
 12:5 The Iron Rod
 13:4 Who Is like the Beast
 13:16 Branded with the Mark
 14:1 Mount Zion
 14:10 Drink the Wine of God's Wrath
 15:2 Sea of Glass
 15:8 Smoke from the Glory of God
 16:6 Blood to Drink
 16:13 Foul Spirits like Frogs
 17:1 Judgment on the Great Whore
 17:4 Golden Cup of Obscenities
 18:1 Fallen Is Babylon the Great
 18:7 I Am a Queen on My Throne
 19:7 Wedding Day of the Lamb
 19:8 The Bride
 20:2 Key of the Abyss
 20:10 The Devil, the Seducer
 21:10 The Holy City of Jerusalem
 21:24 By Its Light the Nations Shall Walk
 22:1 River of the Water of Life
 22:2 The Tree of Life

Liturgy

The Apocalypse could be thought of as a hymn of Christian victory which highlights the plan of Christian salvation. The highlighted heavenly choric songs convey the victory and glory which belong to the Christian faith that overcomes the critical situation in the now. The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ gives testimony that the hour of fulfillment is here. The author of the Book of Revelation takes much of the Old Testament and restates a series of canticles which declare a celebration of salvation with its triumphant joy. The earthly congregation can now identify with the assured eschatological victory that is expressed by the heavenly choirs. From the throne room to the "Alleluia" chorus, the festive celebration is expressed in liturgy for worship.

In the Sunday morning worship service, the liturgical constituents surrounding the sermon should reflect its theme. The unity of thought throughout the service enables the worshipping community to focus its atten-

tion on the theme. The Apocalypse contains a vast selection of liturgy which can support various themes. The liturgy comes in various forms from hymns to laments. These can be taken directly from the Apocalypse to represent the core of Christian theology.

The Apocalypse's rich symbolic imagery is necessary for integration and can be used as the spoken work of the people. The eschatological community orients its reality to the kingdom as it speaks to God and comes to realize the work of the living God in the cosmos which is based on the established future.

Eucharist

The following is an example for a Eucharistic service that is written around the theme of the bride and the marriage supper:

Let Us Celebrate the Banquet of the Lamb

Entrance hymn: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," Martin Luther (Ps. 46; Joel 3:16).

Greeting:

Minister

Grace be to you and peace, from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, from the seven spirits before His throne (1:4).

Call to Worship:

Minister and Congregation

Minister:

Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness, the firstborn from the dead, and ruler of the kings of the earth.

Congregation:

To Him who loves us and freed us from our sins with His life's blood.

Minister:

Who made of us a royal house, to serve as the priests of His God and Father.

Congregation:

To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Minister:

Behold, He is coming with the clouds. Every eye shall see Him.

Congregation:

And among them those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the world shall lament in remorse.

- Minister:** I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God.
- Congregation:** Who is, and who was, and who is to come, the sovereign Lord of all (1:5-8).
- Congregation:** Lord Have Mercy (Kyrie Eleison).
- Minister:** Worthy is the Lamb, the Lamb that was slain (5:12).
- Congregation:** Thou hast made of us a royal house, to serve our God as priests; and we shall reign on earth (5:10).
- Minister:** Words of Assurance
Thou art worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood purchased for God, people of every tribe and language, people, and nation (5:9).
- Congregation:** Glory to God in the Highest (Gloria in Excelsis).
- Minister:** Hear the Word of God.
- Minister:** Exod. 12:5-11,14.
1 Cor. 11:23-6.
- Congregation:** Holy, Holy, Holy (Sanctus).
- Minister:** Rev. 19:7-8.
- Congregation:** Triple Hallelujah.
- Minister:** Ps. 45:13b-15.
- Congregation:** Glory Be to Thee (Gloria Tibi).
- Minister and Congregation:** The Lord's Prayer.

The Offering:

- Minister:** Response to offering.
Accept, O God, these sacrifices that we present on the golden altar before your throne. Grant that the service of your dedicated people may increase so that your glory may increase in your kingdom, until that day when we come face to face at the marriage supper. Through Him who was, is, and is coming. Amen.
- Congregation:** Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow (Doxology).
- Hymn:** "Soul Adorn Thyself with Gladness," Johann Frank (Rev. 19:7-9).
- Minister:** Alleluia! The Lord our God, sovereign over all, has entered into His reign.
- Congregation:** Exult and shout for joy and do Him homage.

- Minister:** For the wedding day of the Lamb has come.
- Congregation:** His bride has made herself ready.
- Minister:** For her dress she has been given fine linen, clean and shining.
- Congregation:** The fine linen signifies the righteous deeds of God's people.
- Minister:** Happy are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.
- Congregation:** These are the very words of God (19:7-9).
- Sermon:** "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-9).

Observance of Holy Communion:

Minister: I invite you now as a member of the royal house of God to come to the Lord's supper and commune with Him and your fellow members of the body of Christ. You have remembered the teaching you have received, observed it by searching your inner being and have sincerely repented from your sins. Come, let us kneel before the throne of God and acknowledge our sinfulness and pray for forgiveness.

Our gracious God, sovereign ruler of the universe, we confess our sins and acknowledge that we have fallen short of your glory. Receive our prayer, have mercy upon us, and forgive our sins. Renew our hearts to be obedient to your will.

- Congregation:** Hear us, sovereign Lord of all, and have mercy.
- Minister:** Our Alpha and Omega, who sent the slain Lamb into the world to reveal your name, help us to remember His passion, His death, and His resurrection.
- Congregation:** O Lamb of God.
- Minister:** Holy and just God, who first loved us, help us to remember the Lamb's worthiness to open the seals of the book, so that your kingdom will come and your reign and glory will be ever present (5:9).
- Congregation:** We remember.

Minister: Holy God, who has always kept His promise, grant us your Holy spirit on your bride for guidance and strengthening of faith so that your nation can offer sacrifices of praise and glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and power be given, and who reigns with you in unity and love, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, the first and last (5:12).

Congregation: This is the hour of victory for our God, the hour of His sovereignty and power, when Christ comes to His rightful rule and from whom the seven spirits of God are sent out over all the world (12:10; 5:6).

Minister: Words of Institution.

Our Lord Jesus, on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Minister: Come, for all is now prepared at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let us remember and let us rejoice that we are invited now, and to the future great wedding.

Congregation: Happy are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9).

Minister: Heavenly Father, as your bride gathers around your table bless us in our eating and drinking. Amen.

Distribution of the Elements.

The Thanksgiving: We give thee thanks, O Lord God, sovereign over all, who art and who wast, because thou hast taken thy great power into thy hands and entered upon thy reign (11:17).

Minister: You are the sanctified priesthood which overcomes by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of testimony and by which the glory of God may be a light into the world. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

Congregation: We now go forth to overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of testimony, until our Lord comes again. Maranatha.

Summary

This chapter has shown the preaching value of the Book of Revelation. It can be preached from several perspectives as the art of preaching brings its message to the situation in life today. The liturgy and imagery in the Book of Revelation are an invaluable resource for the minister of the Gospel in order to convey the whole counsel of God.

The next chapter will present the concluding chapter to this research.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

The Problem

This paper has confronted the problem of the enigmatic confusion surrounding the Book of Revelation. The New Testament Book is avoided as a text by the mainline denomination pulpit. The television ministry, literature, and the secular world have used the text and the symbols from the Book of Revelation to give meaning to modern events. The church stands between these two poles as it tries to find its role between the silent voice and the quagmire of incessant communication. This problem necessitates a hermeneutic for the Book of Revelation so that its message and symbols are communicated from the preaching ministry to the church. The above research has been arranged so that it will contribute enlightened guidelines for the minister of the Gospel.

Research

The research for the hermeneutics for any piece of literature requires the investigation of those aspects peculiar to that piece of literature which hinder it from being understood. If the literature stems from another culture and time period, those aspects present the difference which must be reconciled before a proper meaning can be established. In response to this, the literary and historical aspect of the Book of Revelation was addressed.

The various ways in which the Bible is interpreted will result in different interpretations. Scholars have in the past held, and still hold, different views on Biblical interpretation. The present hermeneutical diver-

sity results in different interpretations of the apocalyptic milieu which surrounds the Easter event. Salvation and the concept of historical time in relation to the kingdom become meaningful in different ways. These approaches have been delineated.

The Bible does not give precise systematic statements of theology. The Book of Revelation has been investigated to decode the author's statements regarding humankind, God, and the Lamb.

The author also presents his theology through his prophetic vocation. Through this vocation, he addresses God's will for His people and what He expects them to do. This speaks to the eschatological aspect of the Apocalypse. The theology of the Apocalypse also reveals the nature and purpose of God. These aspects have been delineated.

Findings

It was the purpose of the research to gather data from which axioms could be obtained for the interpreter. The findings are under the categories of literary, historical, and theology. Biblical interpretation rests on both the literary historical and theological investigation.

Literary Historical General

Hermeneutics

1. An unidentified prophet, named John, wrote the Book.
2. The Epistle was written to the church in Asia Minor.
3. It was written during a time of persecution.
4. It was written to Christians who were threatened because of their faith.
5. The Book was written as a prophetic and pastoral epistle.

Hermeneutics for Apocalyptic and

Prophetic Style

1. The Apocalypse switches back and forth from heaven to earth.
2. The Apocalypse is a divine message to the church.
3. Some of the cosmological descriptions are phenomenological. In Hebrew thought, the sacred and the secular were the same.
4. John uses numerology to denote meaning.
5. John uses colors to denote meaning.
6. John uses imagery to denote meaning.
7. The structure of the Book is symmetrical, not linear.

Hermeneutics for Theology

Through Prophecy and Revelation

1. The Apocalypse is eschatological.
2. The Apocalypse shows an eschatological victory.
3. The Apocalypse shows that the kingdom is a present reality.
4. The eschatological hope of the future rests on the prophetic calling of the saints.

Hermeneutics for Theology

of Revelation

1. The sovereign God has acted to redeem the world.
2. God acts creatively in the world rather than letting it destroy itself.
3. The character of God is revealed as the I Am.
4. The sovereign God deals in justice and truth.

Thesis

It was the purpose of this paper to show that the Book of Revelation has preaching value for the church. The findings have brought the inter-

preter into the world of the author. These will contribute to eliminating the interpreter's world view and assumptions from being interpreted into the literature of the author. The interpreter can enter into dialogue with the New Testament prophetic Epistle in order to prepare the sermon.

The findings have shown that beneath the apocalyptic genre and its symbolic and linguistic difficulties lies a comprehensive and descriptive statement about the New Testament's kingdom of God. God has broken into history and the human predicament to bring salvation. The eschatological Easter event has confronted the god of this world and now the reign of God will be established in totality. A sinful humankind is called to repentance and invited into the present eschatological kingdom. The Book of Revelation reflects New Testament theology.

Conclusion

The New Testament prophetic Epistle is a rich source for preaching. The prophetic Epistle shows God's will for His people and His world. It shows what God has done, what He is doing and what He will do in history. It shows what He expects His people to do in the midst of the evil that surrounds them.

The most obvious issue in the Book of Revelation is the struggle between good and evil. John shows just how stubborn, resistant, and powerful evil can be. He shows that the nature of humankind is easily deceived and deluded. As persons are fascinated and captivated by its power, evil amasses and grows. Humankind is called to repentance, but it is resistant to the will of God, and it insists on worshipping its idols. Even when humankind is given repeated opportunity to repent, it curses God and refuses to let the power of God's reign into the world.

God's good creation had become corrupt, and humankind knew both good

and evil. They had been deceived, deluded and captivated by its power. They had broken their relationship with God. The evil that has entered into God's good cosmos must be removed in order for the relationship to be restored.

God has acted in history to establish victory over evil. The eschatological event of the slain Lamb has brought victory and an assured future. The slain Lamb is now worthy to carry out the necessary judgments to bring about the restoration. Evil has been overthrown, and the hour of victory for our God has come when Christ came to His rightful rule. The heavens can now rejoice, but now the earth is the target of Satan's deceit. The Accuser and Deceiver has lost his battle, and now he is on earth deceiving humankind into idolatry which results in evil.

The age of God's reign has arrived. The kingdom is established by the life's blood of the Lamb and the age of redemption and salvation is here. No longer are the repentant and faithful found guilty before God. The power over evil now constitutes victory for the redeemed as the rule of God becomes established. The earthdwellers are now judged; and those who are dressed in white are liberated from accusations of evil.

The redeemed conquer by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. The testimony of the saints joins the victory of God to bring the reign of God. The redeemed now conquer evil and death through their testimony to Jesus. The Faithful Witness reveals God's concern for His world and His redemptive activity. God's action in Christ's ministry and work is the prophet's concern and testimony.

The prophet's of Christ are now engaged in the battle for salvation. They will conquer by their testimony to the truth about the death and resurrection of Jesus. The world will hate them and may even kill them for their testimony. The eschatological event, however, assures them that their

faith and endurance will bring about the kingdom of God, the full reign of God, and salvation.

The prophet knows that Christ is the Eschaton. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha, and the Omega. He has died and is alive forever more. He controls the past, present, and future. He has brought the kingdom of God into the present. The Adventus has come into the present and continues to come into the present from the established future. The Adventus is bringing the past victory into the present from the future. The earthdwellers, kings of the earth, and Babylon are deceived and place their future on the growth of idolatry; but, those who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb base their future on the Advent to bring salvation from the future. The kingdom is here, and the prophet acts in accordance with God's plan to creatively negate evil. Then the Lord and our God, sovereign over all, will enter into His reign.

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